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Identity Maintenance Through Emotional Release and Rejuvenation: A Link Between Hardcore Dancing and the Straightedge Collective Identity

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**IDENTITY MAINTENANCE THROUGH EMOTIONAL RELEASE AND
REJUVENATION: A LINK BETWEEN HARDCORE DANCING AND THE
STRAIGHTEDGE COLLECTIVE IDENTITY**

by

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THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Aasia Rehman, for inspiring me to study the topic and providing me with the time to do so.

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I would like to thank Dr. Farnad Darnell and Steve Higgerson for masterfully articulating my at-times jumbled ideas (also Steve for his textbook-grade illustration of figure one), Dr. Leon Warshay for providing an encyclopedic theoretical lens through which I could view and express my ideas on this topic, Dr. Heather Dillaway for helping me to make sense out of a seemingly random earlier draft, Dr. Ross Haenfler for his kind help, and Sikander Khan, Jeremy Bonkowski, and Ricky Walker, Jr. for their valuable feedback.

PREFACE

The Straightedge population is tough to pin down for making generalizations. This is due to its creative and dynamic nature. Yet, as one who attempts to do so in the following work, I am left wondering if quantitative studies could happen for this population. The answer most likely lies in trust between participants and researchers. Being a particularly sober and aware group, any study is met with well-deserved skepticism. Many want to know about the ultimate usage of their interview data and why it will be used as such. It is my hope that studies such as this will show that such populations can trust at least some who attempt to study them, with a clear understanding that such a trust needs to be earned, as I hope it will be here.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Straightedge and Hardcore

Straight Edge (sXe) is a diffuse, lifestyle-based social movement chosen primarily by suburban, white youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five (Atkinson 2003; Haenfler 2006; Irwin 1999). Traditionally a male-dominated movement, it emerged from within the hardcore punk rock (hoc) music scene of the early 1980's as a reaction to what was perceived by the punk rock community as the self-indulgent, alcohol-laden mainstream youth culture of the time. The tenets of Straight Edge are that one does not do drugs, drink alcohol, or have promiscuous sex outside of a committed relationship (though the third is often practiced, it is not generally held as high in importance as the first two).

Bands like Minor Threat provided a voice for this growing frustration with mainstream youth ideals and vented this frustration with lyrics that promoted a drug-free culture in songs like "Out of Step (With the World)," "In My Eyes," "Straight Edge," and "Bottled Violence." This feeling of disgust for mainstream youth culture came to a head in the song "Out of Step," which, to those who practice being Straight Edge, delineates the requirements of the Straightedge identity with lyrics that denounce drinking, drugs, and promiscuous sex. Below are lyrics to "Straightedge" (Minor Threat 1981), which demonstrate a growing frustration with perceived values of the mainstream youth:

I'm a person just like you. But I've got better things to do. Than sit around and fuck my head. Hang out with the living dead. Snort white shit up my nose. Pass out at the shows. I don't even think about speed. That's something I just don't need. (Chorus) I've got a the straight edge. I'm a person just like you. But I've got better things to do than sit around and smoke dope. 'Cause I know I can cope. Laugh at the thought of eating ideas. Laugh at the thought of sniffing glue. Always gonna keep in touch. Never want to use a crutch.

The Straightedge lifestyle is bound by a few objective guidelines experienced subjectively from person to person. The general core values of Straightedge allow for variability and fluidity in its subjective expression and a value for change (through constant and creative redefinition via music-related activities). That is to say that while it is possible (and does occur) that some who are Straightedge want nothing to do with the music-based lifestyle (see next section below) that often accompanies it, do not see themselves as part of a social movement; or see their lifestyles as essentially the same as the general public save only for not smoking, drinking, or doing drugs; the vast majority of Straightedgers are in some way involved with hardcore punk rock music and have a qualitatively different lifestyle (than the general public) in some respects which can leave an impression on society (Haenfler 2006).

Being part of a subculture (see next section below) that encourages positive choices for the betterment of oneself (and society) promotes involvement in Straightedge and other entities that fit the bill. It often occurs that those who are Straightedge are also Vegetarian, Vegan, or part of a social movement based on social change through personal choices. Animal rights is a common theme here.

For the typical Straightedge person, the departure from the typical, “mainstream” lifestyle lies in personal choices one makes in gathering with friends, going to parties, and

personal habits concerning the use of drugs (i.e. smoking, drinking, or other methods of drug use). Some Straightedgers attend parties with drinking and/or drugs. In this case, their friends may respect their beliefs and vice-versa to a degree in which such a difference in beliefs is not an issue. Others refuse to be around such activities. In this case, an alternative setting for gathering with friends is needed. For many, this alternative comes in the form of attending shows with others who share their beliefs. Some may not attend shows or parties, yet may participate in the Straightedge identity through the Internet (see Williams 2006). That is not to say that the latter group sit around instead of being social, it's just difficult to make generalizations about them since their particular alternatives to parties and shows vary so greatly.

The physical appearance of many Straightedgers is distinct. Many wear shirts with Straightedge slogans or symbols. Still others will have tattoos of a Straightedge symbol (sXe, XXX, or some variation) and perhaps some words with it. The tattoos may be on their arms, chest, stomach, back, or legs. Their purpose is usually to signify commitment and/or to promote the message of Straightedge (see Atkinson 2003).

Apart from personal choices about drugs, social gatherings, listening to music, and physical appearance, most Straightedgers' lives are the same or similar to the general public. Some may be more vocal than others around non-Straightedge people, while others may choose not to address such a difference. Still others will act according to a specific situation (for example, maybe they will voice their opinions at parties only).

Although Straightedge and non-Straightedge people differ in only a few slight ways, such differences are more pertinent when one considers who to be friends with, how to present

oneself, or what to do for fun.

The role of music, scenes, and shows

There are intermediate factors affecting the subjective Straightedge experience. Examples include specific circles of friends or “crews” within the lifestyle, gender, religious beliefs, and attendance of “shows” with Straightedge bands. For example, there exists a large group of Straightedgers who are Christian and who integrate aspects of Straightedge beliefs into their own Christianity. *The intermediate factor of interest to this study is that of dancing at shows.*

As with many other youth subcultures, music is an essential component (Eyerman 2002; Frith 1996; Williams 2006) of the collective identity associated with the Straightedge lifestyle. Among youth subcultures, music is often experienced through involvement in a local scene. The term “scene” can be used in some ways similarly to the word “school,” as in the Chicago school of Sociology or the Shao-Lin school of Kung-Fu. The difference is that scenes are generally smaller and more specialized. Within the Straightedge sub-cultural space, local and extra-local (“West Coast” for example) scenes emerge. A scene can be described as a social context or venue in which common specific sub-cultural experiences and/or traits are shared. Scenes are gaining attention among culture researchers (Peterson and Bennett 2004; Straw 1991, 2001; Williams 2006) because they are becoming increasingly commonplace among music-centered lifestyles. The larger, national Straightedge scene and many smaller scenes within it share an importance and appreciation for music as a medium through which Straightedge values can be transmitted and reinforced. Within the music scene in general, dancing can (like music itself) ritualize identity processes (Allan and Kidder 2000). Part of the way in which music transmits

and reinforces the Straightedge ideals is through the dancing that occurs at shows. A show can be defined as a local venue whereby bands (in this case, of the hardcore punk rock genre) play music to a crowd of those who mingle (be seen, buy merchandise, and see friends) and/or dance (often, though not always aggressively) to the music. Most shows share some basic commonalities. Usually, there is a fee to enter. Upon entering, one may socialize or look at a merchandise table where the band, which is usually on tour, sets up their records, CDs, DVDs, patches, or shirts to sell. In the background, when bands are not playing, there is usually music playing. Many wait in anticipation for the band(s) to start playing. Shows occur within scenes. The type of scene can determine how the show goes. For example, some scenes have higher levels of violence or different styles of dancing.

A Lifestyle-Based Social Movement

Straight Edge provides an alternative and somewhat insular conduit through which young adults can come of age during an often awkward and uncertain phase in life. It provides community. At any given show, there may be someone getting the equipment ready, another person cooking food, and another collecting money for tickets. As such, it serves as a way to coexist communally, a rare skill that traditional avenues of education often do not teach. The Straightedge subculture is described by most who participate as a “lifestyle.” This term is more accurate than to call it a traditional social movement, since it pervades the everyday lives of those involved. It is a lifestyle-based, diffuse social movement (less structured, ideological, and severely lacking representation in social movement and New Social Movement research, see Haenfler 2004b) that evokes social change through the diffusion of common means and goals.

Even those who are not part of the immediate community still feel attached to the Straightedge lifestyle while surrounded by those who do not share their beliefs. *It is an aim of this study to uncover how diffuse social movements such as this can in some cases reinforce the diffuse social movement identity through a common ritualistic* (Allan and Kidder 2000) *(yet spontaneous) experience.*

Straightedge has unique meanings to individuals who participate. Participants express their Straightedge identities in several ways and have a high degree of variance in doing so (Wood 2003), allowing for customized participation in which individuals integrate Straightedge ideals with their own (Haenfler 2004b). Some never attend any shows (venues where bands play) but instead participate in the Straightedge identity through Internet websites, forums, chat rooms, message boards, and such. In Williams and Copes (2005), it was found that Straightedgers actually use the Internet to negotiate and reinforce boundaries of the Straightedge identity by discussing how certain actions or attitudes fall in line with Straightedge values.

Others attend shows yet do not dance. They simply take in the experience by appreciating the music more for its lyrical value, socialize more with others, or experience the energy from the music and dancing from a greater distance. Some are intimidated (and understandably so) by the aggressive nature of the dancing while others do not feel the need to dance as such in order to enjoy the experience.

Within the group of Straightedgers who attend shows and dance quite noticeably, I focus my attention for this study. This category consists mainly of males (due to its violent, aggressive nature) (Haenfler 2004a). Of those who call themselves Straightedge, this “group” is a minority,

since most Straightedgers who attend shows do not dance. Still, this “group” is of great importance to the Straightedge scene because it is iconic of the Straightedge subculture as it is portrayed by the mass media.

Meanings of Activities

Straightedgers participate in a variety of activities associated with being Straightedge. Each activity has a slightly different meaning in general and from person to person. Some are more universal in their meanings than others. For example, putting an “X” on one's hand prior to attending a show has a universal meaning of getting one excited to attend a show through activating one's Straightedge and/or Hardcore identity. Dancing at (or simply attending) a show is full of universal and customized meanings, which will be examined in detail.

Also to be examined are the meanings behind Internet participation in the Straightedge collective identity. Most respondents in this study participate in the Straightedge identity online at least in part since the main method of interviewing was through e-mailing based on contacts obtained through message boards or forums. *Throughout all of the activities discussed, the meanings to be examined are all pertinent to activating, maintaining, or reinforcing the Straightedge collective identity, with a strong emphasis on the meanings behind and connecting dancing at shows (and related emotional processes) with the one's Straightedge collective identity.* That is to say that for those who dance and experience an emotional release in doing so, the meanings and feelings they describe often overlap from person to person.

Pre-Existing Tension, Release, Rejuvenation, and Identity Maintenance

There are several factors that affect one's commitment to the Straightedge identity,

depending on the person and how he or she participates in the Straightedge identity. The factor of interest to this study is that of dancing at Straightedge shows for those who do so.

Dancing is the factor of interest because it is such an physical and emotional experience that, when observed, leaves one who is not familiar with such things to wonder why one would dance in such a way, how one feels before, during, and after the dancing, and what dancing does for someone emotionally and mentally. When viewed in connection with a specific identity (since the dancing often occurs among like-minded individuals, it begs the question: “Is the dancing in some way connected to such an identity?” and if so, “How?”

Many of those who claim to be Straightedge either attend shows or dance at them. A show is a small-scale concert at a local venue where hardcore punk bands play their music. Usually, the music is accompanied by a mass of people, with some dancing violently in the center or “pit” while listening to the music. The dancing includes running around and/or punching and kicking into the air. Minor injuries sometimes occur as a result, though the overall intention is not to harm others. The dancing experience, as this study examines, is reminiscent in many respects to Blumer's Expressive Crowd, as will be explained below in the theory section. *This study will look at the role that dancing (as part of an 'expressive crowd' as Blumer would frame it) at Straightedge, hardcore shows plays in subjectively enacting and maintaining one's Straightedge identity. It should be noted that while the term “collective identity” will be used, it refers to one's own sense of collective identity and not necessarily that of Straightedgers in general.*

CHAPTER 2

THEORY

(Figures 1 and 2 can be found in Appendices C and D)

Existing Literature on Straightedge

Only a handful of authors have written scholarly articles concerning Straightedge. Patrick Williams has studied Straightedge from more of a symbolic interactionist point of view. His writings address online participation in Straightedge and how sub-cultural boundaries are defined on line. Others have covered issues ranging from tattooing to sub-cultural identity.

Ross Haenfler (cited throughout this paper) has literally written the book on Straightedge. His writings cover collective identities, commitment, individualized participation, cultural change, masculinity, politics, media, militancy, and gender issues in relation to Straightedge, just to name some. By customized participation, Haenfler (2004b) showed how, as mentioned above, Straightedge is a set of few objective guidelines experienced and expressed subjectively from person to person. In the case of this study, the subjective experiences of a group of Straightedgers who dance is examined. As part of a diffuse, lifestyle-based social movement (Haenfler 2004b), this study examines how dancing can be a binding factor for the Straightedge collective identity.

Dancing, in respect to Straightedge, has been discussed by Haenfler in terms of masculinity and aggression, while Eyerman (2002) has looked at the role that music plays in forming identities associated with the music:

It is the live performance at concerts that is the core of emotional attachment and collective identity formation. Here collective experience, listening with the whole

(individual and collective) body is more important than the cognitive experience of the text, at least in the opening stages, but probably all along the way...This emotionally loaded experience will be talked about, remembered, and embodied as powerfully emotional, thus linking the individual to the collective (p. 450).

Similarly, Allan and Kidder (2000) posit dancing as a ritualized activity which “produce(s) emotional energy (p. 35)” allowing for an intense emotional release leading to a sense of rejuvenation.

Building from Haenfler’s writing on customized participation, the Straightedge collective identity, and Straightedge as a diffuse, lifestyle-based social movement; Eyerman’s observations of music as a ritualizing agent, and Allan and Kidder’s position of dancing as a conduit for emotional release and rejuvenation, the following theories are incorporated to explain a phenomenon unique to Straightedgers who dance at shows.

Identity Control Theory

“Social movements exist on a continuum of structure, with one extreme being fully bureaucratized, formal SMOs (Social Movement Organizations), and the other being very diffuse movements devoid of any formal structure.” “A strong collective identity is the foundation of diffuse movements, providing “structure,” a basis for commitment, and guidelines for participation” (Haenfler 2004b:786). *I argue that as part of this binding structure that is a strong sense of collective identity, dancing at hardcore shows (for those who do) often serves as a reinforcing agent and is thus an integral aspect of this structure.* Following Stryker’s recommendation from Burke et al. (2003) and Stryker and Burke (2000), this study seeks to explain the consequence of successful identity verification as opposed to a lack thereof. It also, taking cue from the same set of recommendations (from Burke et al.), explains such successful

identity verification within the (group) identity associated with a social movement. To explain how this is done, Burke's Identity Control Theory must be first explained.

Originating in 1980, Burke's model borrowed from Swann's Self-Verification Theory (Swann 1983), in which individuals seek to verify identities by bringing meanings of behavior in social interactions in line with self-held expectations of meanings tied to identities enacted in such interactions. Burke's cybernetic model is composed of a higher, internal identity standard (such as the “constant” Straightedge identity), a lower identity standard (such as a “changing” Straightedge person who dances at shows), the associated feedback loop which connect both identity standards together with social interactions within which they engage.

This model can best be explained as parts within a cycle (see figure 1). Beginning with the social interaction, behavior occurs. The social situation activates an identity for the individual actor. For example, around Straightedge people, a Straightedge person's collective identity becomes activated due to a normative fit (Stets and Burke 2000). The Straightedge identity in this case is a group identity, which is important in the use of the ICT model since it is traditionally used to explain role-identity processes (Stets and Burke). As the Straightedge identity comes to the fore of the actor's consciousness, a variety of lower, related identities may emerge, depending on the social situation and the intermediate identity relevant to it. For example, if the actor is at a party, there are certain expectations of Straightedge people in how they act at parties (particularly around alcohol and drugs), thus activating the Straightedge party-going lower-level identity. In the case of this study, there is definitely a strong sub-identity related to how Straightedge people dance at hardcore punk shows.

Once the Straightedge identity is active (the higher identity standard), the lower standard is engaged (in this case, the dancing identity). It is with this interaction that the ICT model can be used to explain behavior. Behavior from the social interaction may or may not agree with the lower identity standard's meanings of the appropriate behavior for that identity in such a situation. Therefore, the individual will be quicker to change either the meanings attached to the dancing identity (a cognitive response) or the behavior in the social situation (a behavioral response) in order to bring meanings and behavior in the social interaction in line with expectations or self-held meanings of the lower-level (in this case, dancing) identity (see Stets and Tsushima 2001; Stets 2005).

The higher standard (general Straightedge identity) is also involved, though in a slightly different way. The social interaction, as a product of the interaction with and without the lower identity standard, registers the difference between self-held meanings for the Straightedge identity and those in the social interaction. As a result, it too can elicit a cognitive or behavioral response. Yet, since the higher identity standard is more permanent and internal, it is slower to issue a response that is cognitive (internal) than it is a behavioral (external) response. In other words, since the higher level standard more clearly defines the individual, the individual is quicker to try to create a situation where he or she does not have to change. When meanings of the situation agree with meanings held in the higher standard, self-verification occurs in role identity. Since this study is concerned with group identity, the term depersonalization (seeing oneself as possessing all of the stereotypical traits of the in-group prototype *a la* Stets and Burke) will be substituted, as the model will be used to explain group instead of role identity processes.

Within the social environment, individuals can use objects to help self-verify (or depersonalize) their identity. For example, a boss can enact that role identity at work more so than at home or some other non-work environment. This is true even if the interaction is with the same employees. The fitting term here is power, or the ability to define a social situation in such a way that allows for successful identity enactment (Cast 2003) or self-verification (in this case, depersonalization).

At a show and within one's own Straightedge scene (meaning in a familiar setting with friends), a Straightedge individual has more power to enact the Straightedge identity than at a grocery store, for example. Maintaining and supporting one's own scene is important because it allows one to enact their Straightedge identity (often tied to and sharing values with one's own scene) because one's scene is a way in which to perceive and experience Straightedge more subjectively, or within a local group of friends. *This study aims to show how, for those who dance at shows, a steady sense of identity verification at both levels, as a result of having the power to define the situation and oneself within it, occurs as a result of a special social interaction. This social interaction which allows for the above to occur is one in which a socially approved, sustained, and shared emotional release allows for full participation and engagement. As a result, one's own Straightedge collective identity is verified and if this occurs on a larger scale, the Straightedge lifestyle-based, diffuse social movement identity is reinforced for those who dance at shows and share this experience.*

Elementary Collective Behavior – Blumer's Expressive Crowd (see Figure 2)

As per Clark McPhail's (1989) recommendation, Blumer's stages (and mechanisms) of

elementary collective behavior leading to an expressive crowd will be, at least for this study, more clearly defined. This study also sides with the Symbolic Interaction school in that it shows evidence of a transformation of individuals in which they become less logical and more emotional (McPhail:402). As such, it advances a transformation hypothesis. A mechanism that can be observed working with Burke's ICT is Blumer's description of the expressive crowd. To most who dance at hardcore shows, the experience serves as a cathartic release of tension and often a rejuvenation of the hardcore and/or Straightedge identity. The rejuvenation aspect is explained with Burke's ICT model and the release aspect with Blumer's expressive crowd.

To discuss the expressive crowd, it is important to explain circular reaction, social unrest, and some mechanisms of elementary collective behavior. Each of these leads and contributes to the formation of the expressive crowd, among other types of groupings.

Circular Reaction (vs. interpretive reaction)

Dancing in a group can be seen as a form of circular reaction, especially in the body language conveyed at the start of a song. This is because as the song begins, people begin to shuffle from side to side in anticipation of the breakdown of the song. This usually occurs until an individual acts as a “spark” by being the first to dance and causing others to follow suit. When this happens, especially during the breakdown of a song, reactions serve to further reinforce the feeling of emotional expression that is associated with dancing at a show.

Circular reaction can “give rise to collective, or shared behavior, which is not based on the adherence to common understandings or rules.” (Blumer, 1951:171) It is like dancing at shows because it gives rise to emotional expression only and the dancing, though contained

within pre-established social structures, is chaotic and spontaneous.

Elementary Collective Behavior

This behavior is collective, though perhaps not quite as elementary as Blumer suggests. This is because the disturbance to the status quo as suggested by Blumer, which causes the collective behavior is not spontaneous per se. Dancers know they are about to go to a show and have pre-existing expectations as to how the dancing will be.

Yet the disturbance does occur because of a **pre-existing tension** due to restlessness within the dancers. Indeed, the “wishes, needs, and dispositions” are not satisfied by many of those who dance, and so dancing for them serves two purposes: to physically and emotionally express the frustration arising from this condition (in this case, restlessness caused by a perceived dissonance between self and society or other general angst) and in the process, to reinforce their collective and personal Straightedge identity.

Social Unrest

Restlessness in individuals can exist as individual “neurosis” (such as anger toward others) as well as in a socialized form. By neurosis, in this case, it is meant the state of restlessness one experiences upon constant rejection of mainstream societal values. This socialized form of neurosis occurs as a result of a shared experience (perhaps a change in living conditions) and is reinforced through interactions with others undergoing the same experience (and associated frustrations). Aside for a shared sense of restlessness, being sensitized to one another (or being prepared to readily enter into rapport with one another) is essential.

Some Straightedgers experience a social unrest when they meet. The fact that they share

the Straightedge label and notice each other doing so can create a shared sense of restlessness. This can lead to a sensitization to one another which leads them into rapport to discuss the Straightedge lifestyle, experience, and boundaries (Williams and Copes 2005), which can occur when discussing their shared frustrations with mainstream societal values as well as when they see one another dancing and expressing this frustration (and pre-existing tension) at shows.

The Extent and Intensity of Social Unrest

Social unrest may span small communities or large populations. It may be mild or acute. Within the Straightedge community, it certainly spans large populations all over the world. Social unrest is sometimes mild (as in a conversation between a group of friends about the perils of drinking or the feeling of alienation from mainstream society) or acute (as rarely demonstrated in violent behavior toward those who drink and occasionally at shows towards others in general). In the case of dancing at shows, the degree to which the unrest is expressed through dancing varies from person to person, but should certainly be taken into account since there is a pre-existing tension, which contributes to the dancing behavior. It is important to note that the tension may have other sources apart from anything related to being Straightedge.

Characteristics of Social Unrest

Social unrest can be described as random, undirected behavior with no goals. It is accompanied by an urge to act and a feeling of excitement. This leads to exaggerated views and perceptions. In this state, individuals tend to be irritable, highly suggestible, and “responsive to new stimulations and ideas, and also more malleable” (Blumer:173).

The closest parallel to social unrest within the context of Straightedge individuals

dancing at shows would have to be the state of tension and build-up before the band begins playing or before the breakdown of the song. In this instance, the individual is “transformed,” as Blumer would put it, into an individual acting as part of a crowd instead of as an individual within a crowd. Here, the Straightedge individual allows oneself to be part of the moment and feels the experience as opposed to thinking about it.

The role of social unrest is the breakdown of the order of living to make way for new forms of collective behavior; a transition from one order to another. This transition is much more subtle at Straightedge shows. The transition here is not necessarily in the form of social order, but rather in the form of one's identity (which can collectively affect social order), and it often occurs after repeated experiences. A discrete form of elementary collective behavior occurs in the case of Straightedge dancing. Such a form occurs within the structural symbolic interaction behind ICT that presupposes certain social structures in place in order for interaction to occur. The result is more structured and limited and is a discrete version in contrast with that of Blumer's model.

MECHANISMS OF ELEMENTARY COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR

Characteristics of Elementary Mechanisms

The following are mechanisms that tend to occur as an expressive crowd begins to form. These mechanisms also help to form active crowds, yet they do not determine where attention and direction of energy is focused.

Milling

Milling is a “pure instance of circular reaction” (Blumer:174) where individuals move

around in an aimless fashion. The focus of attention is on each other and less on outside stimuli. This builds rapport and a tendency to act together.

At a show, milling is subjective from person to person. It may occur before, on the way to, or at the show. It may involve discussing the show to come, socializing with those attending the show, moving around to different areas of the show, or by dancing (though not necessarily in the same manner as discussed throughout this paper).

Collective Excitement

A separate, yet often subsequent mechanism to milling, collective excitement “may be seen as a speeding up of the milling process” (Blumer:175) whereby individuals become excited in response to others who clearly are. This often causes one to be carried away by impulses. In this situation, one loses the ability to compare what is seen to a pre-existing mental image defining lines of behavior. Thus, the resulting perceptions are non-reflexive and immediate, unveiling and activating underlying impulses. This mechanism “lays the basis for new forms of collective behavior” (Blumer:175).

One may say that milling turns to collective excitement at the genesis of a “pit” whereby individuals move around and prepare for the “spark” or breakdown to dance. It can act to familiarize dancers with each other, promoting a mutual understanding of shared, pre-existing tension and the acceptance as dancing as a method of release. Subjects report feeling “lost” in the dance, as if in a different reality. This shows a breakdown of the order that existed before the music and a new order forming as dancing comes to be. The order of dancing is it’s own with specific patterns of chaos.

Social Contagion

A third mechanism of elementary collective behavior (which is often subsequent to the previous two), social contagion can be seen as an “intense form of milling and collective excitement” (Blumer:176). In this state, behavior is contagious and “spread(s) like wildfire.”

Social contagion occurs immediately after collective excitement among dancers. Once someone provides the “spark,” be it a first person to dance or the onset of the breakdown of a song, social contagion occurs in a split second.

Stages of Spontaneous Behavior

The above mechanisms can be reoccurring and out of order. To Blumer, they are present to some degree, “in all instances of spontaneous group behavior” (Blumer:176). The result is that “they operate, as we have seen, to unite people on the most primitive level and so to lay the basis for more enduring and substantial forms of unification” (Blumer:177)

The Expressive Crowd

Expressive crowds arise “spontaneously and their action is not set or determined by existing cultural patterns” (Blumer:177). Though this is true for the case of Straightedge dancers at hardcore shows, there still exists a social structure within which the spontaneity occurs.

The Dominant Mark of the Expressive Crowd

The dominant mark of the expressive crowd is that it is introverted with no common goal or objective (unlike the acting crowd). “Its impulses and feelings are spent in mere expressive actions, usually in unrestrained physical movements, which give release to tension without having any other purpose” (Blumer:182). Most subjects interviewed reported releasing tension to

be a prime reason for attending or dancing at a show.

Comparisons with the Acting Crowd

Though within the acting crowd, one loses awareness of his or herself, and though it involves the mechanisms of milling, collective excitement, and social contagion, it remains different from the expressive crowd. This is because in the acting crowd, tension is released through action. In the expressive crowd, there is not direction or target for action, so tension is released through physical movement. In this situation, “the expression of excited feeling becomes an end in itself” (Blumer:183).

At hardcore shows, dancing is not necessarily directed either. Dancers report that they are rarely if ever thinking about anything Straightedge while dancing. Though they dance violently, they are not intentionally directing their violence toward any person or thing.

Rhythmic Expression

People in an expressive crowd act in unison when there exist rhythmic expression and sufficient rapport. The expressive crowd “forms its unity through the rhythmical expression of its tension” (Blumer:183) as opposed to the acting crowd, which does the same through forming a common goal or objective. Blumer claims that this exposes an “interesting association” between dancing and “primitive religious sentiment.”

Evidence of rhythmical expression at hardcore shows can be seen in nodding of heads, moving side-to-side, and in some forms of dancing more expressively. Rapport is sufficient at shows and also due to sub culturally shared identity and experiences. A definite, shared sense of “brotherhood” was reported in interviews (especially during and after dancing). As for religious

sentiment, many Straightedgers are atheist, agnostic, or integrate Straightedge, hardcore with already religious identity. To pose Straightedge or dancing as religious in any way with non-religious Straightedgers seems to strike a nerve, even with those who really “lose themselves” in the dancing.

The Individual in the Expressive Crowd

The subjective experience in the expressive crowd is one in which the shared state of stimulation with those in rapport allows for one to lessen “ordinary self-control” and allow for impulsive feelings to “take possession of the individual.” In this case, one feels carried away by an unknown spirit. This experience of ecstasy and exaltation is sealed with a “sacred or divine stamp” (Blumer:184). Two conditions make this possible. The first is the experience of cathartic release of pre-existing tension. This yields a pleasurable mood, which takes control over the individual. The second is the fact that the experience is shared and easily socially accepted. Blumer claimed that these easily give the experience a religious character; “When an experience gives complete and full satisfaction, when it is socially stimulated, approved, and sustained, and when it comes in the form of a mysterious possession from the outside, it easily acquires a religious character” (Blumer:184).

Once dancing begins (especially during the breakdown and thereafter), interviewees report to feel like they are outside of themselves. The “divine stamp” can vary, if it exists. One possibility suggested by interviewees is an appreciation of the Straightedge scene and ideals.

The Development of Collective Ecstasy

At the height of this expression, objects may take on a link to the ecstatic experience, or

collective ecstasy. This does not always occur with the expressive crowd. For Straightedge dancers, it really depends on the individual or a particular show. It's hard to say what the object would be and it would probably vary from person to person. It may be the song (its lyrics especially). It can often be the Straightedge identity after the show, as I will discuss in terms of identity theory.

Evaluation

The form and structure of the expressive crowd arises spontaneously and “indigenously” as a product of milling and collective excitement. It is based on an interruption in one's life and a resultant pre-existing tension. In sum, an interruption of one's life leads to excitement, release of tension, and a new social order.

In the case of Straightedge individuals, it may occur (and is observed so in later discussions, particularly with Straightedgers who dance at hardcore shows) that the tension or angst one has as a result of everyday causes or frustration with mainstream societal values brings this group of people together. Once together, those involved see others with like experiences and thus exhibit a shared, socialized way of expressing such tension through social unrest. Such a release has consequences for maintaining the identity one associates with such an event (in this case, the Straightedge collective identity and one who dances expressively as such).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Methodological Framework:

After gathering the samples and basic demographic information, open-ended questions were sent via email. Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed across and within in order to inform the next set of questions. The framework was like grounded theory in this way, yet the original open-ended questions were informed by previous literature and knowledge of the subculture/diffuse social movement. Interview data was supplemented by a two-hour observation of hardcore dancing at a show in Dearborn, Michigan in early August, 2006.

Previous studies of the Straight Edge population have been from either analyzing on line message boards (Williams 2006) or in person through participant observation or face-to-face interviews (Haenfler 2004b). In this study, respondents were interviewed through e-mail (via asynchronous interviewing) with open-ended questions, as well as face-to-face and phone interviews.

Gathering Data

This research is unique in that it is a mixture gathering data on Straightedgers from online sources and through interviewing. In this study, respondents were interviewed through e-mail with open-ended questions. Most of the e-mail respondents expressed interest in participating in this study in response to postings on Straightedge message boards and myspace.com groups. All respondents were initially sent a questionnaire asking for their

preference in conducting the interviews (mailing list-like discussion vs. chat room vs. on-going email). The choice for email correspondence won decisively (only two respondents preferred another method).

Though some met these postings with skepticism, many enthusiastically offered their participation. Over a hundred responses poured into a default e-mail account set up for the purpose of this study, which were then sorted for age (since this study deals only with those eighteen and older) and then by scene participation (as in whether or not one dances at shows) outlined below.

After gathering the sample, responses of interest were filtered through a default e-mail account to which they came. Within the account, only those who indicated to be eighteen years of age or older were kept on the list of participants. E-mails came in response to an advertisement of this study on message boards. The advertisement read as follows:

I am a drug-free graduate student who is writing a Sociological thesis on the sXe (note: this is short for Straight Edge) lifestyle. I am looking for Straightedge people to interview for this research. The topics covered will include: commitment to Straightedge, and how individuals express Straightedge identity. The research will involve up to three rounds of short, simple surveys followed by up to ten open-ended questions. If you are interested in this research, respond to (specified e-mail address).

It was mentioned that I am “drug-free” (which always has been true) to gain interest and trust from possible respondents. To be sure, “drug-free” means not doing drugs or drinking, yet not labeling oneself as Straightedge. To each e-mail inquiry, I responded with “This study is designed to measure commitment to the Straightedge identity. It's actually for my Masters Thesis. I am currently trying to compile as large of a sample as possible to prepare. Thanks for

your interest and I will add you to the list for the study.” Next, I sent brief surveys (no more than five questions) to filter for gender, age, and degree of show participation (dancing). When the sample size reached thirty, I began the e-mail interview process. To each selected respondent, I sent a list of open-ended questions about how they feel while dancing at a show, whether the experience is a release of tension or an energizing experience (or both), why this is, and how dancing happens at shows. Some members dropped out before sending responses, but others joined soon after, so the sample size remained equal throughout.

Sample

The following breakdown of respondents reflects participants who responded to most or all sets of questions presented. The sample of interviewees who responded to open-ended questions consists of thirty-four people broken down into four main groups: “No Shows,” “Attend Only,” “Dance at Shows,” and “From Refuge.” Overall and with few exceptions, most respondents were white (as are most who are Straightedge). Data on religious preference (or lack thereof) was collected since there exists a subgroup within Straightedge of Christians who integrate Straightedge with religious beliefs. This can be seen in bands who tour and promote Christianity and Straightedge in their lyrics, as in those who attend such shows and participate in on line message boards with the same theme. It was important to measure the influence of this on responses coming from those with such beliefs. It was also important to make their ideas heard (if such individuals were among those in the sample), yet not representative of those with different (save for being Straightedge) beliefs. Aside for this reason, religion may also affect one’s experience of release. If the experience in dancing and feeling expressive leads to a

spiritual experience, it is important to note the religiosity of the individual having the experience. Since many Straightedgers are not religious, it is important to identify the nature of the experience in the most accurate way possible.

The “No Shows” category consists of seven people ranging in ages from eighteen to twenty-nine. Five were male and two were female. This group was the most diverse in terms of religion, with Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Agnosticism, and Atheism being represented. Members of this group reported that they do not attend shows.

The “Attend Only” group had ten members with six females and four males. Ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-two. All males in this group reported to be Atheist while all females reported being Christian (with two exceptions, who did not specify a religion). This group claimed to attend shows without dancing.

The “Dance at Shows” group included ten members with eight males and two females. Ages ranged from eighteen to thirty. Most reported to be Agnostic, Atheist, or not having a religion. There were two Christians in the group (both males). Members of this group claimed to dance regularly at shows. It was difficult to find many females from this group, since females who dance at shows are quite rare due to its violent, aggressive, and male-dominated nature (Haenfler 2004a).

The final e-mail group, “From Refuge,” consists of four males observed dancing at a show (the venue being a shop called “Refuge”). All indicated being Agnostic, Atheist, or having no religion. Two respondents were twenty-six years of age and the other two were twenty and twenty-one.

The remaining three respondents were interviewed primarily over the phone or in-person, with one of them not being Straightedge (anyone in the study who was not Straightedge either once was and could explain the process of hardcore dancing, which is similar for anyone regardless of being Straightedge or not). All three, however, have or currently do dance at hardcore shows. There were five or six additional respondents for the first three groups who only responded to simple, closed-ended questions like “What do you do to promote Straightedge?” and were not included in the above breakdown of the sample.

Another separate sample consisted of roughly twenty males who were observed dancing at a hardcore show. The purpose of this sample/observation was to directly observe the mechanisms behind the crowd behavior from which this type of dancing emerges. The mechanisms and forms of dancing observed at hardcore shows among those who are Straightedge and non-Straightedge are usually identical. This is important because it is not claimed in this paper that being Straightedge affects how one dances, or that it even affects how one feels while dancing (though this occurs for some). The role of hardcore dancing is for allowing a socially-experienced release of tension. The meanings one may have for such an experience may vary. For those in my study who dance in such a way, the meanings serve to reinforce their Straightedge identity after a period of time following the show (and upon reflection).

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

To protect confidentiality of all respondents, all information was saved in one specific e-mail account assigned for this study. Only I know the password for this account. I accessed this

account only in private, where only I was exposed to the information from each respondent. When corresponding to the respondents as a group, I entered their addresses in the “b.c.c.” portion of the e-mail, which means that when individuals received the e-mail, they were not able to see the e-mail addresses of other respondents. The “to” section of their received e-mail from me only said “interview.respondents.” Respondents were sent, upon commencement of the study, an information sheet describing the goals, details, and possible risks associated with this study.

All respondents who answered to this were added to a new contact group list: “confirmed.respondents.” At that point, I deleted all correspondence and contact information from all “non-qualifying” respondents from the account.

At the end of the study, I deleted all e-mails to the trash folder of the account and then permanently deleted them from there. I also permanently deleted all e-mail addresses from the account’s address folder, so that no trace of the identity, e-mail, or messages of any respondent remained. This happened immediately for respondents who do not fit the criteria of this study (i.e. under eighteen years of age or not Straight Edge).

The Interview Process: How Data were Collected and Analyzed

Upon receiving approval from the Human Investigations Committee, respondents were sent an informed consent form verifying their participation. This form was sent as an attachment in the first group email that asked specific, non-demographic questions.

Original questions were drawn up for the first interviews. The questions were based on the starting point of the study: What makes one dance at a show, attend without dancing, or not

attend shows at all? A mixed approach (pre-formulated questions, subsequent grounded theory, and participant observation) yielded emergent findings that informed most of the other questions. Questions inquired into the relationship between dancing at shows, experiencing Straightedge in general (with its meanings), emotional release, rejuvenation, and identity. Some questions required follow up probes (Meho 2006) to clarify meanings and expand on what was previously typed.

The first mass e-mailing was sent out to all respondents to confirm a typical regional demographic (suburban or urban) and to present options for conducting the electronic interviews. On-going interviews were supported all-around as a preferred method, which was important to ensure that data could reliably be collected. Throughout the correspondents, demographics such as age, gender, race, and religion were taken to ensure that the sample was typical to most who are Straightedge .

The second message was sent again to all respondents to filter them into three distinct groups. The “No Show” group consisted of those respondents who indicated that they do not attend shows. The “Attend Only” group consisted of those who attend shows but do not dance at them. The “Dance at Shows” group consisted of those who attend and dance at shows.

Next came the first message sent exclusively to the “Attend Only” group. These questions were designed to measure why some do not dance at shows yet still attend and participate in other activities. Why one attends at all and how one feels about the experience of attending was also discussed.

The next message was sent to the “Dance at Shows” group. These questions were

designed to measure if these individuals attended shows for similar reasons as those who do not dance. They also measured why one dances, how that experience feels, how it compares to not dancing, and how it could be described in terms of emotional release and/or rejuvenation. The idea of emotional release is closely tied to Blumer's expressive crowd while the idea of rejuvenation is tied to Burke's ICT model.

There were also questions in this set measuring the sense of community one feels while participating in activities related to being Straightedge, as well as activities that remind one of being Straightedge. These questions were important in understanding the collective nature of the Straightedge identity and how it relates to dancing, since dancing at shows naturally came up in the responses to previous discussion pertaining to being Straightedge. Dancing naturally came up because being Straightedge and attending shows usually goes hand-in-hand. And for many who attend shows, dancing does as well. From these emerged data pertaining to dancing at a show in order to support a band. Questions based on this idea were asked later in keeping with a grounded theoretical approach.

The next message was sent again to the "Attend Only" group. These questions were similar to the previous set so that a qualitative comparison could be made between those who dance at shows and those who only attend (in terms of feelings and meanings associated with respective experiences). This was also in keeping with grounded theory, since some responses from dancers seemed to be universal (such as how they feel when singing along or upon arriving at a show). The role of music, shows, and the scene in one's Straightedge community was a common theme throughout all three groups and was thus important to probe for information

among all three groups.

A final, group-specific message was sent to the “No Shows” group to compare for the variables mentioned above. It was important to see if the emotional release and rejuvenation observed in the previous two groups (though lesser for the “Attend Only” group) played out in different contexts for those with less or no contact with their local scene (or if this could even be measured, which it couldn’t in this study).

Finally, since the idea of supporting one’s local Straightedge scene and promoting Straightedge in general came up so often in previous interviews, questions were directly posed to all respondents regarding how they support their local scene and promote Straightedge in general to look for trends across all three groups.

The final group consisted of four individuals among many others observed dancing at a local show (in Dearborn, Michigan). While observing their dancing, specific attention was paid to what exactly prompted the dancing and the emotional experience associated with it. From this experience, questions were drawn up regarding factors causing one to dance and the nature of the experience. These questions were posed to the selected respondents in the same e-mail format as above.

Throughout the whole process, three personal friends who are or once were Straightedge and have experience with attending and dancing at shows were consulted to help make sense of trends and ensure validity.

In the end, quotes which seemed to get to the heart of what I was measuring (the dancing process, emotional experience, rejuvenation, identity processes, collective behavior, and

associated sense of Straightedge community or collective identity) were used. The themes seemed to jump out more as a result of questions derived from emergent findings. As a result, a snowball-like effect occurred and provided the richest data of all questions.

E-mail Interviewing as a Method

As a method, e-mail interviewing (in this case, using the Google-based Gmail) offers great convenience in terms of categorizing respondents and tracking data. Contact groups can easily be established and key words within conversations can be searched for when needed. It was easy to gather a sample by posting at on line sites and forums, which cost nothing. It gives respondents time to think in the privacy of their home or other convenient location. This is especially helpful for shy people.

There are, however, some limitations, which can be reduced or overcome with certain techniques. One downside seems to be that there is no definite way to confirm one's age or obtain an in-person signature. This is a risk was reduced by not mentioning the age requirement until after administering a general demographic questionnaire. At times and for certain sites, it was important to contact the site administrator to communicate the topic and purpose of the study. Being upfront and clear about the purpose of the study helped to ease suspicions that some had. Some express in words better than writing. This may be due to poor writing skills or a heavy use of nonverbal cues. To overcome this limitation, one may encourage the use of acronyms, abbreviations, and emoticons (Meho 2006).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In order to look at relationship between the dancing experience and the identities one associates with such an experience, it was first important to understand how dancers experience being Straightedge in relation to non-dancing Straightedgers, since such a connection between dancing and identity is only examined and suggested for those Straightedgers who dance at shows (in an intense, aggressive form). Dancing was operationalized by the interviewees. Some dance more intense than others. Yet, based on the responses, it seems that more intense dancing leads to a greater feeling of release and “other-worldly” experience.

It is important to note that there are many other ways to reinforce and maintain one’s Straightedge collective identity aside for dancing at shows or even attending them. These ways will be briefly discussed. The association made between dancing and the Straightedge identity may only occur for a minority of Straightedgers. Yet, if the previously suggested (see Theory section) mechanisms behind this association are occurring, there may be important implications for future studies of diffuse social movements and expressive crowd behavior.

What Does Straightedge Mean?

As previously mentioned, Straightedge takes on specific, subjective meanings for each person. When the question heading this section was posed to Straightedgers of all three groups (Dancers, Attend Only, and No Shows), many common ideas emerged which were consistent with Haenfler’s (2006) book, which explains the Straightedge ideology. Themes of making

positive choices for oneself and society and being part of a group of friends with a purpose seemed universal throughout most responses, as xNolanx illustrates in his quote: “[T]o quote Mahatma Gandhi "Be the change you want to see in the world" This commonly occurred within the context of a hardcore scene and often at shows. XSteveX makes such a connection:

SXE is my personal choice of living. I chose not to be controlled by big companies and their addictive products. I can be myself all the time, this is who i am and i don't want and don't need any drugs to take effect on me. I can have more fun because i'm clean. I can handle reality, i don't need substances to rely on. SxE means a lot to me. I can't imagine better things than singing along at a show to a sxe song from a favourite band with my friends, and having fun. I feel sorry for people who's lives suck that much that they need to get totally wasted at the weekends to try and forget how miserable their lives are during the workdays. Their idea of fun is just unacceptable for me.

As can be seen in the previous quote, a clear connection is made between having Straightedge beliefs and participating the a hardcore punk rock lifestyle. The connection one feels with peers who share the same beliefs and lifestyle is shown to be important as well, as Straightedge is usually also a very social aspect of one's life. XRalphX puts it this way:

To me it's a personal choice and I have always liked to be aware of what is happening instead of not being able to recall fun times and shows and anything I do and its also means to me that im stronger person then to give in to [peer pressure] and follow the crowd and take part in jack ass activities.

As XRalphX illustrates, Straightedge means a source of strength in the face of peer pressure for many. The peer pressure one faces in mainstream society to drink and/or do drugs can be intimidating. To have such a source of strength makes individuals feel comfortable in being who they want to be without having to please those who have

different beliefs.

What Draws One to a Show?

Whether or not they dance at shows, respondents indicated common reasons for attending them. Attending for the music, bands, friends, a release, and overall experience were most common. Though their activities at shows may vary, everyone interviewed who attended shows shared some common experiences. Those who dance still expressed having the same type of experience as those who do not, save for the time spent being caught up in the dance. These levels of participation and experience are reminiscent of Haenfler's (2004b) distinction between general and specific levels of participation in the sXe scene. Accordingly, those who participate in primary levels might go to shows and listen to Straightedge bands. At the secondary level, they tend to be more involved in their scene and may also have other beliefs that compliment Straightedge, such as being vegetarian or vegan. In the case of these results, the levels of participation are specific to the context of a show.

Many associate going to shows with being Straightedge. XSteveX, when asked what he associates with being Straightedge, responded: "Doing a fanzine, going to shows or simply listening to sXe hardcore or singing along to a straight edge song." The genre of hardcore punk rock is infused in many of its sub-cultural activities, but going to a show is the most common of them (save for simply listening to the music). Similarly, XPhilX explains:

going to shows is probably one of the biggest activities that give a sense of the straight edge community. this past saturday i was actually at Edge Fest in auburn new york which is a 12 hour drive from milwaukee. i went with my friends edge band and just being there with mostly straight edge kids and having the different straight edge clothing companies, like seventh dagger, motive company, and 1981, and different booths there was just incredible.

From XPhilX's comment one may infer that the experience of the show serves as the hub of other activities (such as seeing the different clothing companies) associated with Straightedge.

When asked why one attends shows, a most common response (or theme) was to feel a sense of community in a novel setting unique to members of the hardcore and/or sXe subculture. Feeling part of such a community (and for some, having a distinct role within it) seems to be a main goal and subsequent result of attending. On the way to this feeling, members participate in singing along with their favorite songs (which provides a sense of unity when seeing friends and others doing the same), meeting new people with similar values, and by supporting the band by dancing, buying band merchandise, and helping the band set up. Many enjoy the feeling of experiencing music live and feeling the instruments being played. Some, particularly those who dance, claimed that they supported their scene by attending shows. These activities, together with the sensory experience of live music, create energy in the crowd that contributes to perceived unity and sense of overall community, as "Kelly" explains:

Going to shows has been a collective experience like no other. The atmosphere at a good show is almost too amazing for words. It's a sense of family and belonging in the small hardcore community combined with pure excitement and an energy that fills the room. You can feel the electricity in the venue right before a decent band comes on, and when they start to play, the floodgates open, and it's a chaotic scene of sweaty boys and the occasional girl running around, jumping, singing, and forgetting the outside world. The music is raw energy and the bands have something to say, a message to contribute. All I hear on the radio is of sad heartbreaks, love... Hardcore keeps it real. It's about life, the crappy times, the amazing moments with your friends, the back stabs and betrayals, irreplaceable friendships, and taking it all in stride. Yet, with all that said, it's the people that keep me coming back. I've met some of the best people going to shows, a lot of a-holes as well, but kids that know how to make the most of a moment. I go for the music, the energy, the spirit of hardcore, and the friends I've found.

As “Kelly” illustrates, the feeling of the togetherness and energy in the context of a live band playing music (which heightens the energy of the experience) draws one to a show. The message in the music is important for many who attend. It is distinct from most songs and has more of a personal or real meaning. This sense of novelty associated with a show is important.

Why Do Some Dance?

As previously mentioned, and referring to Haenfler’s (2004b) distinction between levels of participation, dancing serves to add another level of experience to attending a show. People dance because it’s fun, yet there are reasons for why it is fun.

Dancers report that when they love the music, it makes them want to (or “have to”) dance. XSteveX explains: “I dance at shows to have fun. most of the time i rather sing along, do stage dives and circle pits, but sometimes i mosh it up as well. It's just what I do at shows, i can't stand around with my arms crossed and just watch the bands.” Individuals feel compelled, through the music, to dance. This happens at most concerts of dances where people assess that it is socially acceptable to dance and felt moved by the music to do so.

Dancing also serves as an outlet for built up angst and tension allowing for emotional expression (release) and a chance to forget about one’s everyday circumstances through a physical outlet. “Fred”, a dancer at shows, explains:

I dance at shows because it gives me an outlet to get out all of that built up angst, and it's a place where I'm free to let loose for a few minutes and forget about the fact I have to go back to work Monday morning and face the same mundane crap again. I can express myself with a group of other guys doing the exact same as myself, jump up, pile on and yell into the mic, or open the floor up and just cut loose.

Some dancers claimed that dancing is a way of supporting a band or scene because it keeps the hardcore spirit alive and encourages the band, as “Kerry” illustrates: “When you move around for the band it shows them that you are enjoying their music.”

XNatashaX explains:

For me it's very energizing to attend shows and dance. It somehow gives me strength. To be in a group of people that all enjoy the same music, somehow the feeling of not being alone, the memories of the concert that stay with me.. all that is giving me strength.

As XNatashaX illustrates, just the memory of the dancing experience gives her strength. The feeling stays with her. She dances at a show in order to have the memory of it which gives her strength. The importance of the memory of the dancing experience and its consequences for the identities one associates with such an experience gets to the core of the topic of this paper.

Not all dancers dance in exactly the same way, yet as XJeremyX explains, “Punk shows have always been the same pretty much. Circle pits and the occasional skanking.” A “circle pit” consists of intense, usually aggressive dancing in the middle with the perimeter being composed of on-lookers or those who are shoving others into its center. Dancers will run around and/or through the pit in a variety of ways.

What makes intense dancing occur at shows?

With no announcement, the band takes the stage. All but the singer face inward, toward one another and away from the crowd; they are not here to entertain. And the singer himself does not really perform for the audience. Sometimes he faces the audience, but more often than not he sings with his face looking up, eyes turned even more upward, or bend completely over shouting into the microphone. He is crouched down on the floor; he is not the stage. His legs are spread apart and bent, and his hands are gripping his legs. He looks almost crab-like, swaying back and forth. Breathing heavy, then heavier and more rapid. His body is tense and the tension builds. It seems that he is orchestrating the

emotional mood of the music, dark and angry. The music starts, slow, dark and building. When he sings, he paces in front of the assembled group and around the stage, moving in powerful, animal-like strides. And his voice shows no concern for harmonic structures, but it arises from the depths of his soul as a guttural growl (from Allan and Kidder 2000:30).

It is in this setting that a blast of music escapes and sets the stage (pun intended) for the...

Precursors to being socially stimulated, approved, and sustained and cathartic release

Data from (and observation of) interviewees who dance at shows has proven to coincide closely to how Blumer describes the formation of the expressive crowd, yet they add some important additions to this explanation that should be noted. The form of expressive dancing (as a result of intense dancing and socially-supported cathartic release) at shows requires that the following factors be present.

First, there must be a sufficient amount of people at the show so that no one feels awkward in dancing. The more potential dancers present, the greater the possibility for collective excitement and social contagion. The following quote from "Chris," a non-Straightedge dancer illustrates:

Dancing at shows can be like a whole different world and I think a lot of it starts with the amount of people at a show. A bigger show will probably entail a higher level of dancing. With less people being there I think a lot of kids will feel more "on the spot," and more embarrassed almost...The heavier bands will bring out kids who are more into a more violent type of dancing, I've heard it referred to as "kick box" or "ninja" mosh.

Second, if dancers are already familiar with each other, they will usually dance with less hesitation. In this sense, they have developed a rapport, as Blumer would put it.

Third, the style of music or the band itself will affect one's will to dance. If, for example, the band is playing a slower song, there will probably not be anyone dancing violently.

Fourth, the type of people present is important to some, especially with those who have been in the scene for a longer time. Many of the older cohorts complain that the dancing is not the same as it once was, as “Rob,” a non-Straightedge dancer explains:

Today's dancing is shite. People have *no rhythm* and they just flail their arms around sporadically. They look like epileptic bags of rice. It's totally *contrived*. I think a lot of it is younger kids trying to impress each other. They get the wrong end of the stick. If you were to look at real [hardcore] shows from the 80s you would understand that the music actually moved the dancers. They were compelled by the noise, the rhythm, the energy, the kinetic force, and they responded to it naturally. It wasn't choreographed pseudo-sung-fu like you see a lot of new jacks doing today. I think younger kids just feel they need to "dance" like this (because) it's expected of them and they don't know any different. Skanking is a valid dance that you do see sometimes these days too. Skanking is a timed, rhythmic response to a certain beat. People do it in unison and it makes sense. Circle pitting is another response to a fast beat that makes sense. But all that kung-fu shit is for the birds.

Fifth, the floor vs. stage set-up of the venue can be detrimental. If there is a stage, there is a perceived separation between the band and the dancers. When the band plays on the floor level, there exists more of a feeling of togetherness with the band, and often the singer will go into the crowd while singing to dance and let others sing along. This contributes to crowd energy, a sixth factor that affects one's will to dance and comfort in doing so.

A seventh factor is the desire to have fun. Some dancers do not necessarily identify the experience as a release as much as a way to have fun with friends, as “Rob” explains:

I didn't go to a show w/ built up tension and let it off on the dance floor. I went to a show, and if i liked the band a lot I would dance and it would feel good. But it was done for fun. It was a way to express your interest and intense feeling for the songs. If I had a bad day in high school I wouldn't release tension by dancing at a show. It just makes you feel good.

The desire to release pre-existing tension could be listed as a factor, but will not be here

because it is often less of a conscious part of why one dances. There are two more factors to be discussed, yet they will be treated separately due to their importance. They are the part of the song being played and the “spark.”

The Spark and the Breakdown

It is hard to predict how dancing will happen at any hardcore show. Sometimes certain regional scenes (California shows, for example) will affect how people dance, for example. Most hardcore songs, whether Straightedge-inspired or not, have set structures. In most cases, there is a part of the song known as the breakdown, which occurs either in the middle or at the end of a song. Prior to the breakdown, the song builds in intensity, which can be felt by dancers and seen in the intensity of the dance. The breakdown provides all of the potential energy needed for intense dancing to occur, but, like a stick of dynamite, it requires activation energy to make it kinetic. This “spark,” which lights the fuse, so to speak, occurs usually at the onset of the breakdown. It is important to note that the spark may occur once the song begins and/or at the breakdown, depending on the song's pattern of intensity.

The spark is usually provided by one person who decides to dance (more) intensely before anyone else. This person often enters the center of the pit or dance floor and, almost immediately, others follow suit. “Jeremy,” a Straightedge dancer, describes a spark at the onset of a song: “Commonly, to relieve the tension and ignite the “spark,” kids will start dancing as soon as the band starts playing...People will start running back and forth and getting other people fired up. For most people, *heavier parts* (breakdowns) will *excite people and make them get more into it.*”

At most shows, the spark can be observed with a careful eye on the crowd and ear on the music. One can feel the music and crowd energy building in intensity, as evidenced by the speed and/or style of dancing and the rhythm of the song. This came through in the participant observation area of data collection. In addition, since dancers are often familiar with the songs being played, he or she who decides to provide the spark usually knows as well as feels when to begin. Once the spark occurs, the mass of dancers seems to take on a life of its own, much like the coalescing tightly bound shoal of minnows rising within a convection current. Viewed from afar, they both seem to act as one larger organism.

The spark is quite a powerful phenomenon. Tensions vary in quality and quantity from show to show and within a show, as do reactions to sparks, as “Chris,” a non-Straightedge dancer explains: “I think that most of today's "moshers" are always waiting for the same two people to start of the pit and *get things moving*. It’s a shame that at heavier shows that same "spark" will usually bring out a fight or two.” The above quote demonstrates that sparks do not always yield the same results and therefore can be indicators of a change in intensity of activity, but not exactly what nature of activity one can expect.

**More Than Just Dancing:
A Release of Pre-Existing Tension Leads to an “Other-Worldly” Experience .**

The energy one brings to dance with such intensity can originate from a variety of sources. “Dan,” a thirty year-old Straightedge dancer, provides an example: “...when you bottle up all the frustration *from the world, school work, etc...* then you have a great way to expel all the frustration of life and a way to re-energize your batteries (*like going to the gym*).” Similarly, “Phil,” an eighteen year-old Straightedge dancer illustrates: “And I guess when I mosh

sometimes it releases tension. I really don't do it for that purpose but *it is a physical activity* and most activities are a way *of releasing stress and tension*.”

Phil's comment demonstrates that even though dancers may not intentionally derive the energy they use to dance from outside causes of stress, it can still work out that way.

“Steve,” a twenty-two-year-old Straightedge dancer shows that not only is it a release of pre-existing tension or stress, but it also is a way to mentally relax.

It's like a punching bag. When I'm moshing, I don't feel anything special, I just think about the music, and the beat. Nothing comes to my mind at that point, it's blank. It's a very tiring way of dancing, but it is energizing. When I go to a show, a week before it I can't wait to be there. [I] put down the shift and go to a show where I can *get rid of all the tensions and stress* by good times.

For many, dancing serves not only as mental relaxation, but a way to connect with another state of mind (or “other world,” as was often expressed).

Others describe this “other-worldly” feeling as a product of a release, which again agrees with Blumer. “Natasha,” a Straightedge dancer, explains, “Well, when I mosh its a big *release of tension*. Its adrenaline flowing, and a way to not only get away from the world, but *reconnect with another world*.”

As evident in this comment from the use of the word “reconnect,” the dancer not only feels to be part of another world, but also recalls previous experiences of doing so and therefore has expectations as to how it should be. “Earl “reflects these thoughts:

Dancing is both a form of *cathartic release*, and also an energizing experience. It allows me to *get rid of the things* that have been bothering me around that time through physical exertion. I love wearing myself out, dancing as hard as I can to bands that I love, and screaming the words at the top of my lungs. *It takes you to another place mentally*, and just lets you be your most primal self.

In this situation, Earl is likening dancing at a show to a good physical workout. He

experiences the physical and mental benefits of exercise through dancing at a show. In addition, the cathartic release provides a layer of experience not found in most forms of exercise. This experience is further illustrated by a previous quote from Chris, in which he described dancing at a show as being in a “whole different world.” From *Straightedge*, Ross Haenfler's (2006) comprehensive book on the Straightedge movement, “Patrick” explains:

If you can go to [a] show and feel like you're on top of the world when you leave, like you've just had a religious experience...how could you beat that?! [laughs] I just feel like there's very, very few things – especially in today's world – that can give people like a sense of self-worth and positivity. People talk about going to raves and just having this unreal experience, with the music and the lights going. Get some of those kids to a good hardcore show and see what happens. There is nothing in the world that is like that, goin' to a show like that and seeing a hundred kids piled on top of each other with the band just inches away from where they are and frickin' microphones in there – this huge melting pot of energy...Literally we got out of a Boy Sets Fire show and were like “That was like going to church.” That was like having your faith revived. Your strength renewed.

In agreement with Blumer's mechanisms explaining elementary forms of collective behavior, when a “socially stimulated, approved, and maintained” (Blumer 184) cathartic release occurs, it easily acquires a religious character. However, it must again be noted that the vast majority of Straightedgers are not religious; many to a degree where they would find it insulting to suggest that what they do even resembles religion (as such, it *may* be labeled as a spiritual-like or “other-worldly” experience, though this can be subjective). Some who are religious integrate the Straightedge lifestyle with their religious practice, though it is not clear to what degree they associate or integrate the “religious” experience of dancing at shows with their own spirituality. Yet still, one can see a transformation occurring.

It is also important to note that while dancing, with few exceptions, most Straightedge dancers are not thinking about being Straightedge or the Straightedge movement in general.

“Jeremy” explains:

I don't associate straight edge with dancing. I would expect someone who is edge to dance just as much as someone who wasn't. I guess if you were at a show where a straight edge band was playing, you would typically find more edge kids in the mosh pit. Just like if you were at a show where the band sang about getting drunk, you would find a lot of drunk buffoons. Or a girl singer bringing out more girls, etc...

Here, “Jeremy” demonstrates an important point: There is often quite a diverse array of lifestyles present at any given show, or in any pit. It is true that some shows have all Straightedge bands and thus mostly Straightedge dancers, but the hardcore punk scene overlaps many different areas of social and/or political thought. As previously mentioned, he also comments on the lack of immediate relationship between dancing and Straightedge. Such a relationship, as described in this work, occurs in one’s mind upon reflection of a previous dancing experience.

**The Product of the Dancing Experience:
Rejuvenation of the Straightedge Identity as a Result of Reflection on the Night's
Emotional Release and “Other-Worldly” Experience**

After a night of dancing and, in effect, being part of an expressive crowd, there exists a time of reflection of the night's activities in which one evaluates the feelings and actions associated with dancing and general participation in the show. Though it is true that one does not think necessarily of being Straightedge while dancing, many make a mental connection between the experience and the reason why it was so fun. That connection is often an appreciation of the fact that no drugs or alcohol were required

and the environment was clean. When asked what gives him a sense of Straightedge community, “Ralph” said: “Being able to remember what went on at the show when [you] wake up the next day and just being able to do stuff which [you wouldn't] be able to do if [you] were drunk or drugged up.”

As XPhilX explains: “Hanging out with my friends is an activity that reminds me of being edge. it reminds myself that i can have a great time without using drugs or alcohol as a source of fun. going to shows of course too.” In this case, it is the combination of the experience of being with like-minded friends and experiencing a release of tension that acts to make the memory so pleasant and memorable.

This can easily be seen as a reinforcement of one’s Straightedge collective identity. Similarly, “Tom” says: “When the night is over I feel refreshed again. When I wake up with bruised ribs, cuts and scrapes all over my body it just makes me look forward to doing it all over again next week.”

Put theoretically, for many who dance at shows, the Straightedge collective identity is closely tied to show attendance because shows are one facet of the hardcore music sub-culture, which originally spawned the Straightedge lifestyle. As such, reflecting upon the “other-worldly” experience from the show can be emotionally rejuvenating and also help to reinforce the Straightedge collective identity one has, since the dancer identity is part of the overall Straightedge identity. Turner would call this process “depersonalization,” or seeing oneself as possessing the essential traits of the in-group prototype (Stets and Burke), which is the collective (or social) identity

equivalent of self-verification (Michener, DeLamater, and Myers 2004).

How do Non-Dancers Experience the Show Differently?

For those who do not dance (at least not in or in contact with the “pit”), the experience can be markedly different. Most non-dancers described attending a show as a release of tension and energizing experience, yet not so much due to physical exertion and to a lesser degree of intensity. Instead, it seems to be a result of sharing a sensory experience with others who are watching and feeling a connection with them. The connection one feels with other at the show is often a result of singing along and realizing that the experience is being shared with others who have similar, rare tastes for the same type of event.

XSteveX illustrates that: “[sXe] means a lot to me. I can't imagine better things than singing along at a show to a sxe song from a favourite band with my friends, and having fun.”

Those who usually dance can experience the show in the same way when they do not dance in addition to their own experience. “Leila” reflects on the show experience as a non-dancer:

I feel excited about going, and generally, if it's a good show, I feel in awe of the band playing. Also, sometimes when a great band is playing there is a real atmosphere, and you're there with loads of other different strangers, but you're all really digging the same music, and I think that type of connection is pretty cool.

As “Leila” mentions above, sometimes the great feeling one gets from a show is not just from sharing it with friends, but with others who share the same commitment to Straightedge values. The rarity of such values makes such an event a novel experience.

Why Hardcore Dancing is Not for Everyone

There are countless ways to reinforce or maintain one's collective identity. Dancing is not necessary in order to reinforce or maintain one's Straightedge collective identity. The argument and mechanisms presented in this paper are strictly for those who dance expressively and experience a genuine sense of release and rejuvenation in the process. When asked why they do not dance at shows (yet attend them nonetheless), responses from non-dancers seemed to fall in the following categories: feeling embarrassed to dance, disliking the violent nature of hardcore dancing, not feeling welcome to dance (due to gender), and preferring to enjoy the experience without dancing (yet still feeling the energy of the experience). Still, some dancers will at times not dance if certain conditions are not present (see factors for dancing below).

Some respondents claimed that they come from small scenes where shows tend to have less (if any) hardcore dancing. This often led to little dancing experience, so when they went to shows where dancing did occur, they felt that they could not dance and would feel awkward doing so. Others had been to shows with dancing, yet they still felt they did not have the skills needed to dance and feel confident in doing so. Still others formerly danced yet no longer do because of previous negative experiences or a change in perspective, as XRossX explains:

I used to "dance" at shows about four or five years ago. I stopped for a number of reasons. One, I wasn't very good at it, and no one likes to participate in an activity for very long that they're being shown up by frequently. Another was that I was sick of the violence it exuded. Usually the kids dancing were a few friends, and everyone else dancing ended up getting hurt by them, or tried to hurt everyone else. It was never a "united" scene like the ideals in songs talk about. Another was that as I grew up I suppose, it did seem a bit more juvenile to me, kind of "silly", you know? I would rather just head-bang or sing along, or watch from the back, than get all sweaty in the pit, and risk getting seriously fucked-up

(which happened to a friend of mine, and three years later she ended up having to get some surgery because it healed wrong - sucks!) just to express emotion to a song. The best enjoyment is watching the band perform the songs you love live.

Still, others cited the violent nature of dancing as annoying and intimidating. They did not want to get hurt at a show and just wanted to enjoy the music and live performance in peace. Some had prior experiences of injury while dancing or had witnessed such injuries. An interesting point made by “Larry” was that his scene was particularly violent: “The Dallas scene is full of tough guy douche bags that like to beat up on anyone not in their crew that dances. I recently went on a trip and we attended shows in other cities and I danced because they were there for the music and weren't concerned with everyone else.”

Female respondents tended to feel intimidated by the violent, male-dominated dancing (which it tends to be) and cited that as the reason for not dancing, as “Sharron” explains: “I don't hardcore dance at shows because I'm a lot smaller than the other people and am afraid of getting hurt. Also, it's often looked down upon if girls dance.”

XLindaX mentioned feeling insecure to dance due to her body image in addition to the other reasons: “well its a few things. girls aren't encouraged to dance I could if I wanted but I don't I'm not a huge dancer I just go to listen to the music and the whole stereotypical body image thing...I don't feel comfortable dancing because I'm overweight.” Most females concurred that a major reason for not dancing was because it is generally frowned upon and not accepted for women to dance at shows.

A common idea in responses to this question was that many prefer to enjoy the live performance without distractions (i.e. the aggression, danger, and sometimes drama involved)

such as dancing. It seems that when sXers attend shows, they experience the energy of the shows in their own way which depends on how they partake in and perceive the activities.

Why do Some Straightedgers Not Attend Shows?

Of the respondents interviewed who do not attend shows, a distinct way of being Straightedge emerged. There are some who consider themselves Straightedge as much as anyone who dances at a show, yet they do not even attend shows. They still share the same core Straightedge values. The reasons for choosing this form of participation vary but all show that the core values of Straightedge can be experienced in many ways.

One common reason for not attending shows was living in an area where there is no Straightedge scene. In small towns, this is common, as “Dale” explains: “I just haven't. No reason not to. I don't know much about the scene here, and I don't know too many sXe people around here either, so it's hard for me to find out when a show is.” Others felt a lack of familiarity with their local scene (having less friends in the scene or not having attended shows at that particular place) and therefore expressed feeling awkward going to local shows. Some do not attend shows due to a lack of money (there is usually a fee to enter ranging from about five to ten dollars).

Still for others (a small minority), their musical preference does not include hardcore music, which separates them from the vast majority of Straightedgers. “Teren” illustrates:

I don't attend shows because there aren't any... and also, the music doesn't really appeal to me. I'd much rather go to a Morrissey show and enjoy the music, and keep my personal choices separate to the music I enjoy. Just because I'm Straight Edge, doesn't mean I enjoy punk music.

These respondents indicated going to shows (of their own preferred genre) based on the music

itself, which separated them from other Straightedgers who attend shows for social reasons. This demonstrates, as Haenfler (2004b) describes, a customized participation. It also shows that some share the Straightedge values, yet not all facets of the lifestyle.

Some respondents used to attend shows, but expressed disillusionment with the politics of the music and/or band scene as “Herman” explains:

Well - referring to the straight edge scene: most of the music is formulaic, violent, mindless and lacking any lyrical merit or meaning outside of applications for 'dancing.' The music I listen to is meaningful, insightful and passionate - and if that's missing, I'm not listening. I also despise (again) the segregationist and sensational tactics of Seventh Dagger bands which are trying to divide the world into a black and white 'us vs. them' mentality.

"Herman" illustrates what Haenfler (2006) devotes a whole chapter to: positivity vs. militancy. There exists a recognized minority of Straightedgers who tend to be more militant in their views. Such groups tend to have less tolerance for those who drink or use drugs and express such a view in song lyrics (for band members) and actions (in some cases, through violence). Such actions tend to put off other Straightedgers, as the above quote illustrates. There is a definite division in Straightedge as a result.

Others simply expressed that they currently have more responsibilities in their lives (such as school, careers, or family) and cannot find the time to attend shows. This removal from the Straightedge/Hardcore scene meant feeling a lack Straightedge solidarity for some. There were also respondents who said that they still felt the same way and wished they had the time to attend and/or dance at shows again.

Often, this group of participants tended to express their Straightedge identity over the Internet (see Williams 2006, Williams and Copes 2005) more than in person. Online

participation as such is possible due to an abundance of message boards, chat rooms, and networking sites specifically for Straightedge. When asked how one supports the Straightedge scene, those who do not attend shows tended to indicate creating 'zines or maintaining message boards or websites more than others.

Overall Differences

To be sure, the main distinction between the dancing and non-dancing experience at a show is in the level of physical-emotional release with others (dancers experience this more intensely through physical means). Those who did not dance seemed to reflect more on singing along and connecting with others that way. In both cases, a socially initiated and maintained release occurs for many who attend, with a seemingly greater intensity of release seeming to occur for those who dance, based on relative descriptions of the experience.

For those who do not attend shows, the ritualized and binding experience that a show provides does not seem to apply. This group of people seems to reinforce and maintain their Straightedge identity by other means, such as through Internet participation.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In Response to Blumer

Blumer views social unrest as the process through which restlessness (a pre-existing tension which cannot be released with traditional means) is socialized through circular reaction. In other words, social unrest is a way for individuals who are “restless” to come together and release themselves of their restlessness in a socially acceptable way. Findings in this study suggest that pre-existing tension and restlessness are the result of a perceived dissonance (by individuals) between values of oneself and of mainstream society.

Circular reaction serves to socialize restlessness. Restless individuals realize that others are sharing their experience and thus (or because they) communicate through gestures, body language, and perhaps speech that they are about to do something to release the tension that they all share. Circular reaction makes one feel uninhibited to release tension (or lose restlessness) and is thus contagious (social contagion).

In this case, moving back and forth in anticipation of the spark serves as circular reaction when others respond in turn. It can also be said that merely being at a show and appearing ready to dance can have similar effects, though perhaps not as pronounced. There are important factors at work, however. The size of the crowd, familiarity with those present, the style of music, type of scene, stage set-up, crowd energy, and pre-formed expectations about the experience will affect the degree to which circular reaction occurs (and thus expressive crowd behavior).

An important nuance to note here is that the order of events at a show often does not

follow the sequence as Blumer describes. For example, one may not enter into circular reaction until after a song has begun. One may not respond to others who are involved in circular reaction, but be triggered by part of a song or when the dancing begins.

According to Blumer, the resultant actions lack understandable objectives and involve a feeling of collective excitement. This feeling makes one more sensitive to others and responsive to new ideas. For those dancing at shows, however, the objective may be to feel solidarity with a particular band, scene, lifestyle, or something else. Since the objective is abstract, the dancing is still expressive. Since Straightedge is a subjectively-experienced lifestyle, it can be difficult to pin down the objectives or meanings of dancing (while doing so) for the group as a whole.

The role of social unrest, as Blumer describes, is to establish new forms of collective behavior in light of a breakdown in the order of living. Dancing at hardcore shows in itself does not represent the breakdown of any social order. Individuals who dance do not necessarily behave differently the next day. The connections here as well are more abstract. Instead of a symptomatic breakdown of the order of living, assembling at shows and dancing as such represents a rejection of traditional means of entertainment (especially for those who are Straightedge in that they are not out drinking or at a sports bar) and an embracing of an alternative form. Consequentially, it also represents an embracing of a new lifestyle for many. *In this way, the order of living has been altered. Instead of changing daily behavior, the experience serves to reinforce meanings behind behavior that one has for associated identities (specifically, the dancer and straightedge identities). It is in this way that a diffuse social order is maintained in the form of maintaining one's Straightedge lifestyle, which itself is a diffuse social movement.*

Again, this is only referring to Straightedgers who dance at shows and undergo the aforementioned mental processes.

Another point of separation between Blumer and this study is that of rhythmic expression. According to Blumer, the dancing (expressive) crowd moves in rhythmic fashion and acts in unison. This is not necessarily true in the case of hardcore dancing. At the beginning of the song, before the breakdown, there may be rhythmic movements, but once the spark occurs, dancing tends to be chaotic and lacking in structure. As such, expressive behavior is occurring in the absence of rhythmic expression.

Finally, the idea of expressive behavior, through the release of tension, establishing conduct (dancing), which is marked with a diving stamp, is important to address. Most Straightedgers who dance at shows will not see dancing as what makes them Straightedge. Nor do they see it as divine, as many are non-religious. Many do report, though, that dancing serves as a way to have a “spiritual” or “other-worldly” experience. Therefore, the conduct of dancing does, to many, entail an otherworldly stamp instead. Perhaps this is how hardcore dancing, in its various forms, came to be a substitute for what others do to experience similar feelings. Some have compared (if not in a joking manner) the feeling to attending an intense religious service. In this study, no such comparison was made. Yet still, feelings of forgetting the outside world were verbalized.

Transformation

The transformation hypothesis of crowd behavior is widely accepted inside and outside of academia. It suggests that ordinary and logical individuals (see LeBon 1897) are transformed

by a crowd in the process of partaking in crowd behavior. In the process of transformation, the individual loses common sense and logic. This hypothesis has been criticized for lacking empirical or logical foundation, as others (including Blumer's mentor, Mead) would argue that at times of distress, individuals' sense of logic and agency increases (McPhail 1989). Findings from this study seem to be consistent with Blumer and Lebon's argument after a certain point within expressive crowd formation. By this, it is meant that while dancers approach the situation with their ability to think rationally in tact, for a brief time after the "spark" and while they dance, the emotional release that results is not necessarily a logical experience.

"In crowd situations the individual acts not because he or she is automatically infected by group emotion, but rather because certain lines of behavior are seen as appropriate" (Marx and Wood 1975). The above statement is consistent with my findings to a certain degree. Individuals do report dancing when the situation seems inviting, yet at one point (after the "spark"), emotion seems to take over.

(Not so) Spontaneous Restructuring of Social Order

Since collective identity is reinforced for so many people, it can be said that a sub-cultural social order is affected (whether maintained or changed) in the process of the emotional release and rejuvenation involved with dancing at a show. Though Blumer suggests that expressive crowds lead to a spontaneous restructuring of social order, my findings suggest that this restructuring can be spontaneous within set parameters since there exist a set of conditions and contexts within which the expressive behavior occurs. Yet, once the expression does occur, spontaneity certainly exists.

Straightedge and Identity Control Theory

The use of group (collective) identity and depersonalization (both from Social Identity Theory) with Burke's Identity Control Theory is new to identity research. The ICT model is typically used to describe processes of self-verification of a role identity, with each level of identity standard containing meanings attached to roles one occupies in a social situation. For example, in the role of a mother (higher standard), the lower standard could be "does not allow children to swear." In this case, I have substituted them with the meanings attached to a context within which one expresses or enacts a group identity. In this way, the lower level standard (dances "expressively" at shows) supports the higher-level (Straightedge general collective identity) standard. Since many reported that dancing at a show is a way of supporting Straightedge and also part of being Straightedge, it is assumed that dancing, for those in this study who dance at shows, is an integral part of the Straightedge identity.

Also unique to this study and with the use of Burke's ICT model is the idea that the processing of social behavior on the part of the higher-level identity standard can take hours to occur. For example, if one were to dance at a show in such an expressive manner, experience a release and "other-worldly" feeling, and then go home to bed, the sense of rejuvenation (and hence depersonalization for the higher identity standard) can occur in the morning after realizing how great the experience was, and how great it was to not have needed alcohol or drugs to experience such a thing.

This occurred for those who dance at shows in a way that it did not occur for those who do not dance, which may suggest that the physical-emotional release of dancing (a higher level

of sensory experience, as mentioned in the findings) stays in memory longer and more clear than other activities or passively participating.

New Social Movements

Adding to Haenfler's (2004b) assertion that the Straightedge lifestyle-based social movement has the lifestyle as its central binding factor, this study shows that there can be other centripetal forces within the movement, in this case dancing. For those who do not dance, other, less expressive activities may serve the same purpose though may not have such an impact. For example, many who do not attend or dance at shows indicated participation in on-line scenes or creating their own 'zines. Feeling as part of a community seems important to many and how they choose to do so within the Straightedge lifestyle will vary.

ICT and Blumer

Straightedgers who dance take from a night of dancing at Straightedge and/or hardcore shows a feeling, upon reflection, of satisfaction with their Straightedge lifestyle and their place within it. The subjective release manifests itself as its subsequent rejuvenation as the individual takes from the experience a specific, yet shared experience that reinforces one's personal and collective Straightedge identity. This allows for the individual to feel confident in (and look forward to) repeating the experience, with expectations tied to the structured spontaneity associated with the experience.

It is helpful to again connect Blumer's subjective approach to Burke's objective approach with respect to findings. *The social interactions taking place, as a result of processes associated with the expressive crowd (and for some, simply as a result of watching the show and feeling*

connected with others in attendance), allow for successful group identity verification (depersonalization) on both levels (Dancer and Straightedge identities) in a way that non-emotionally charged experiences do not. In such cases, the social situation has the added emotional charge that intensifies the interactions and memories of the experience.

At the core of these arguments is the idea that who we are affects how we express ourselves, and the way that we express ourselves affects who we are. Identity shapes expression shapes identity; similar to how commitment to an identity shapes social behavior shapes identity salience (Stryker 1980).

Importance

Further understanding of this and other types of expressive crowds is always of use not merely for crowd control, but more importantly for understanding the nature in which crowds (in this case expressive) are motivated, sustained, and re-emergent. Building from this understanding is the link that can be established between the expressive experience associated with some types of crowd behavior (if dancing together in a group can be labeled as such) and the consequences for one's identities (thus leading to possible re-emergence).

Another link is made between subjective and objective perspectives of Symbolic Interaction. The objective side of Symbolic Interaction used here (primarily from the work of Burke, Stryker, et al.) and especially of Burke's identity control model has seldom if ever been explained with respect to Blumer's expressive crowd. The combination of such approaches is important to paint a clearer picture of such social interactions, especially in changing, modern contexts.

Limitations

It is true that not everyone who is Straightedge dances at shows. It is equally true that not all of those who dance do so in the same way. Yet it can be said that aggressive and/or expressive dancing, though they take on several forms, often lead to a form of release. This release and the associated consequences it has for one's Straightedge identity is the focus of the paper. It is important to note that the mechanisms presented in this paper do not account for the subjective experiences of all Straightedge people; they may only account for a small minority.

Dancing is not always violent at shows for all people. Throughout the responses, some may have been describing a release from dancing that was done by themselves, or away from the mosh pit. Though most of the dancing at shows is done in close proximity to other dancers who are dancing aggressively, this does not always have to be the case. The exact way that each respondent dances was not taken into account and is something to be considered in future studies.

Implications for Future Studies

Quantitatively, and more in accordance with the structural Symbolic Interactionist approach, one may measure commitment (for those who dance) to Straightedge and Dancer identities (or salience thereof) before, during, and after dancing at a show. This can show a link, if any exists, between an expressive crowd experience (emotional release with "other-worldly" feeling) and the salience of related identities. It could add more to the nexus proposed in this study between emotional release, rejuvenation, and identity processes.

Qualitatively, and perhaps in addition to the above proposed study, there exists a gap in

documented styles of dancing and the processes involved that needs to be filled. Such information could definitely add precision to my observations and any future ones. The results of this work can easily lead one to study how similar situations occur for social interactions that are not emotionally charged.

The larger question that this study generates pertains to how modern, diffuse social movement identities are reinforced and the consequences for such reinforcement. And what of the link between these findings and a longing one may have for a sense of community? Is there a sort of resulting bond forming between dancers and others or the scene in general? Are these bonds substitutions for something? The answer is likely to be evasive since Straightedge is such a subjectively-experienced lifestyle.

APPENDIX A: CORRESPONDENCE

(1) Sent 4/29/06 to all respondents.

Dear Respondents, Can you tell me which best describes you in the subject line?

1. Which best describes your current academic standing: high school, college, graduate, not in school

Which best describes your current residence: urban, suburban, rural

Would you be interested in participating in a mailing list-like discussion on sXe?

Would you be interested in participating in a chat room-like discussion on sXe?

Would you be interested in participating in an on-going, e-mail interview on sXe?

Sample response (in subject line): high school, suburban, yes, no, yes Thanks, Michael

Rationale: to select the method of data collection which would produce the most data based on respondents' preference.

Findings:

Mainly high school or college, urban or suburban.

The ranking, in order by popularity (greatest to least) was: ongoing e-mail interview, Mailing List, and Chat Room. This confirmed that my e-mailing method could be used effectively for maximum responses.

(2) Sent 5/27/06 to all respondents.

Dear Straight Edge study participants,

Officially, I will begin interviewing within 2 months. I will be interviewing three groups of sXe people:

1. those who do not usually attend shows
2. those who usually attend shows
3. those who usually attend and dance at shows

I will be filtering for these three types of people soon, but feel free to indicate in a reply which of the three categories you fit into in the meantime. If at any time you wish to be omitted from this study or to be taken off of this mailing list, please reply with "NO MORE" in the subject line.

Thanks,
Michael Lance

Rationale: to filter respondents into three distinct groups for analysis of the role that type of participation plays in the link between emotion and identity among sXers.

(3) Sent 6/23/06 to ATTEND ONLY group.

Hello.

Here is the first round of questions. Before you begin, please read the information sheet (attached). Questions:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Race
4. Religion
5. Why do you only attend shows (sXe, hardcore) and not dance? Describe, in as much detail as you like, what keeps you from dancing at shows.
6. Why do you attend shows? Again, use as much detail as you like.
7. How do you feel when you attend a show?

Please respond with the appropriate number next to you answer.

Thanks!

-Michael

Findings:

(5) Frowned upon if girls dance. Smaller and afraid of getting hurt.

(4) Sent 7/9/06 to DANCE group.

Hello. Here is the first round of questions. Before you begin, please read the information sheet (attached). Please respond with the appropriate number next to you answer and in as much detail as you can without going crazy. :)

Questions:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Race
4. Religion
5. Why do you attend shows?
6. Why do you dance at shows?
7. A. Describe how you feel when you attend a show.
- 7.B. Describe how you feel when you dance at a show.
8. (for 7A and 7B) Would you consider this a release of tension, an energizing experience, or both? Explain how.
9. How often do you attend shows?
10. What activities give you a sense of sXe community? Why?

11. Which actions or activities do you do that remind you of being sXe, aside for abstaining from drugs?
12. About what percent of your friends are sXe?
13. What does it mean to be sXe (to you personally)?
14. Tell me about your local sXe scene.

Thanks!

(5) Sent 7/9/06 at 3:10 am to ATTEND ONLY

Here is the second set of questions. I'm not sure if they went out before so I hope this isn't a copy. Please be sure to have replied to the first set of questions and put question numbers next to you answers.

Thanks,
Michael

1. Describe how you feel when you attend a show.
2. Would you consider this a release of tension, an energizing experience, or both? Explain how.
3. How often do you attend shows?
4. What activities give you a sense of sXe community? Why?
5. What actions or activities do you do that remind you of being sXe, aside for abstaining from drugs?
6. About what percent of your friends are sXe?
7. What does it mean to be sXe (to you personally)?
8. Tell me about your local sXe scene.

Rationale: To see how the experience of attending a show differs between dancers and non-dancers in terms of feelings and meanings. Also to see if non-dancers have other activities which serve the same function as dancing for those who dance. Also to see if dancers have different meanings of sXe than non-dancers.

(6) Sent 7/9/06 to NO SHOWS group.

Hello. Here is a set of questions for those of you who specified that you do not attend shows in general. Please respond with the appropriate number next to you answer and in as much detail as possible without going crazy. :)

Thanks,
Michael

1. Age

2. Gender
3. Race
4. Religion
5. Do you do anything associated with sXe that acts a release of tension or energizing experience? Explain.
6. What activities give you a sense of (or make you feel connected to the) sXe community? Why?
7. What actions or activities do you do that remind you of being sXe, aside for abstaining from drugs?
8. About what percent of your friends are sXe?
9. What does it mean to be sXe (to you personally)?
10. Tell me about your local sXe scene.
11. Why do you not attend shows? 12. Would you dance at shows if you attended? Why or why not?

Rationale:

To see if those who do not attend shows have a substitute activity associated with sXe that provides a sense of release or rejuvenation? To see how sXe meanings for these people differ (if they do) from those in the other groups.

(7) Sent on 7/25/06 to all groups.

Dear Respondents,

In reviewing the responses, I found that sXe is promoted differently from person to person. Out of curiosity (and for the benefit of this study), I was wondering if you could answer this question: How do you promote sXe (if you do)?

Thanks,
Michael

Rationale:

It seems like dancing at shows is, to some, a form of supporting a band or scene. This made me wonder, for those who do not dance or attend shows, if they support bands or scenes in ways that dancers or show goers do not.

(8) Sent on 8/11/06 to REFUGE group (those I observed dancing at a show)

Hello.

I am the guy who took your email address at the show at Refuge on Wednesday night. I was hoping that I could send you some questions to answer, which will be a part of my thesis on Straight Edge and the hardcore music scene. Anyhow below are the questions and attached is the info sheet which describes my study in more detail, though it has changed slightly to include

more on the Hardcore scene in general in terms of dancing. I will gladly send out the finished paper when I am done this fall. Thanks for your time,

Michael

Feel free to skip any questions you wish. Please answer in as much detail as you can.

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Race
4. Religion
5. Are you Straight Edge?
6. How often do you dance at shows?
7. Are you in a band? If so, how often to you play shows vs. attend them?
8. Tell me what you know about dancing at hardcore shows (i.e. types of dancing, when the dancing occurs, how it varies during different parts of the song, how it starts, etc..)
9. It's been observed that usually tension builds, then there is one or two people who provide the "spark" that starts the dancing. Do you agree with this? What factors do you think influence people to start the dancing?
10. How important is it for you to know the lyrics or meaning of the song in order to really get into dancing? Use a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not important and 10 being extremely important.
11. Is dancing a release of tension for you or an energizing experience? Can it be both?
12. If you are Straight Edge, do you associate the meaning of sXe music with dancing (assuming you dance to sXe bands)?

Rationale: After participant observation of hardcore style dancing at a show (where many or most present were sXe), I made a list of questions (above) based on observations made at the show and from speaking with some of those who attended the show.

(9) Sent 10/01/06 to ALL groups.

Hello.

I am almost done with my thesis now. Once complete, I will send out copies to whoever wants one. I have three more questions for you though, and they are:

Which best describes you?

- a. I dance at shows
- b. I attend shows but usually do not dance
- c. I rarely or never attend shows

How do you support the sXe scene? It can be local or the general scene.

- a. making 'zines

- b. dancing at shows to support bands
- c. attending shows
- d. buying merchandise
- e. helping bands set up at shows
- f. participating in online sXe forums, sites
- g. running a sXe site
- h. Other _____

How do you support sXe bands?

- a. buying their merchandise
- b. dancing at their shows
- c. Other _____

Thanks,
Michael

Rationale:

After the previous mass mailing (7/25) revealed diverse ways of participation in sXe through supporting bands and the sXe scene in different ways, I was interested in how this varied by sXe participation, as categorized by this study (no shows, attend shows, dances at shows).

APPENDIX B: HIC APPROVAL



HUMAN INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE
 101 East Alexandrine Building
 Detroit Michigan 48201
 Phone: (313) 577-1628
 FAX: (313) 993-7122
<http://hic.wayne.edu>

 NOTICE OF EXPEDITED APPROVAL

To: Michael Lance

From: Ellen Barton, Ph.D. Ellen Barton
 Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)

Date: July 18, 2006

RE: HIC #: 074906B3E
 Protocol Title: Straight Edge Identity and Hardcore Shows: Actions, Feelings and Meanings
 Sponsor:
 Coeus #: 0607003909

Expiration Date: July 17, 2007

Risk Level/Category: No greater than minimal risk.

The above-referenced protocol and items listed below (if applicable) were **APPROVED** following *Expedited Review* (Category 7*) by the Chairperson/designee for the Wayne State University Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3) for the period of 07/18/2006 through 07/17/2007. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required.

- E-mail Advertisement
- Information Sheet

-
- Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. You may receive a "Continuation Renewal Reminder" approximately two months prior to the expiration date; however, it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval **before** the expiration date. Data collected during a period of lapsed approval is unapproved research and can **never** be reported or published as research data.
 - All changes or amendments to the above-referenced protocol require review and approval by the HIC **BEFORE** implementation.
 - Adverse Reactions/Unexpected Events (AR/UE) must be submitted on the appropriate form within the timeframe specified in the HIC Policy (<http://www.hic.wayne.edu/hicpol.html>).

NOTE:

1. Upon notification of an impending regulatory site visit, hold notification, and/or external audit the HIC office must be contacted immediately.
2. Forms should be downloaded from the HIC website at each use.

*Based on the Expedited Review List, revised November 1998

Straight Edge Study

As part of a Sociological thesis for Wayne State University, I am studying the Straight Edge identity. Specifically, I am studying the different lifestyles of those who are Straight Edge. I am looking for respondents who can interview over email.

This study will benefit Straight Edge because of the exposure it will bring. It will benefit society giving exposure to a drug-free way of thinking and living. Participation will not be paid. It will consist of a series of emails (5-7 in all), each one taking a few minutes to compose and the main one taking ten to thirty minutes, depending on the details you provide to the open-ended interview questions. For more information, please contact me (Michael Lance) via email:

interview.responses@gmail.com

APPROVED

JUL 18 2006

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
HUMAN INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE

Name of Study: Straight Edge Identity and Hardcore Shows: Actions, Feelings, and Meanings

Research Information Sheet

Title of Study: Straight Edge Identity and Hardcore Shows: Actions, Feelings, and Meanings

Purpose:

You are being asked to be in a research study at Wayne State University to study the Straight Edge identity in relation to the hardcore punk music scene.

Study Procedures:

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to respond via e-mail to questions about what being Straight Edge means to you and about show attendance, if you do attend shows. If you do not feel comfortable answering any questions, you may refuse to and remain in the study if you wish. The study will consist of one e-mail to confirm participation, a second one to ask preliminary questions, and a third with the official questions. Up to three follow-up emails may be sent. Each email will take from ten to thirty minutes to complete, depending on how detailed the responses are. The study will take place over the summer and will end by September.

Procedures:

1. Subjects are recruited online for the study (from Straight Edge message boards).
2. Subjects are confirmed via email about participation.
3. Subjects receive official information (above) about the study and what is involved.
4. Subjects are asked preliminary questions to establish groupings.
5. Official questions are sent out, data collected.
6. Follow-up questions are sent out, data collected.

Benefits:

There may be no direct benefits for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future. It will also benefit the Straight Edge lifestyle in terms of exposure. Society can benefit by the exposure of a drug-free way of thinking and living.

Risks:

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study.

Costs

There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

Compensation:

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any

Name of Study: Straight Edge Identity and Hardcore Shows: Actions, Feelings, and Meanings

questions or to withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

Questions:

If you have any questions now or in the future, or if you think that you need to report a research related injury, you may contact Michael Lance or one of his/her research team members at the following phone number (313) 523-0660. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Human Investigation Committee can be contacted at (313) 577-1628.

Participation:

By completing the interview, you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPROVED

JUL 18 2006

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
HUMAN INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE

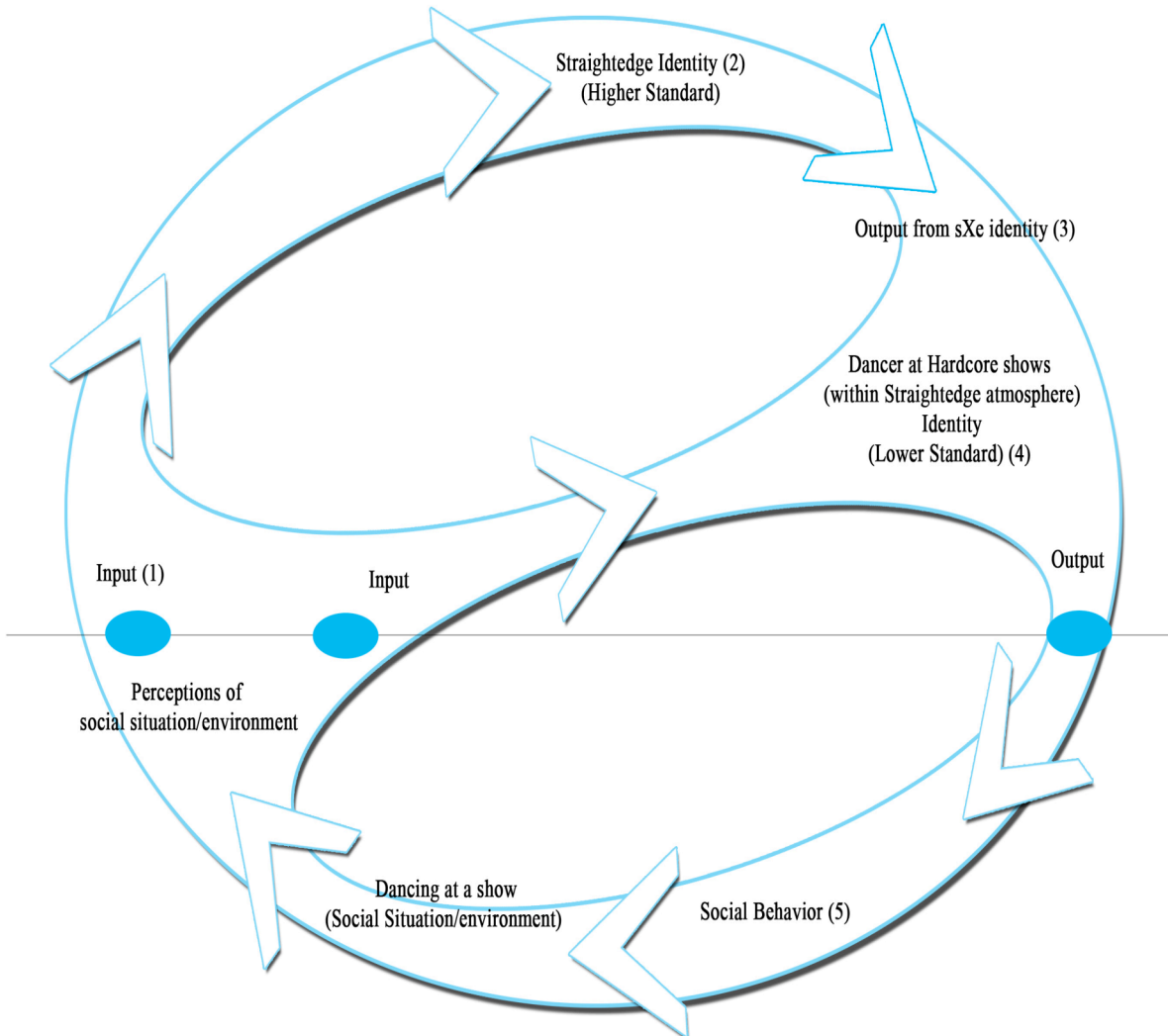
Submission/Revision Date: [06/19/06]
Protocol Version #: [Insert Number]

Page 2 of 2

Version 1.0

APPENDIX C: FIGURE 1

From Burke's Identity Control Model:



1. The "time effect" occurs here. Path one takes hours to complete. It occurs after the adrenaline and excitement of the night's release occurs.
2. Once path one is complete, reflection occurs and the overall sXe identity is reinforced.
3. Once the overall sXe identity is reinforced (and hence rejuvenated), the dancing identity is also...
4. reinforced and associations are made between dancing at shows and an emotional release and rejuvenation of the sXe identity.
5. This promotes more dancing at shows.

APPENDIX D: FIGURE 2

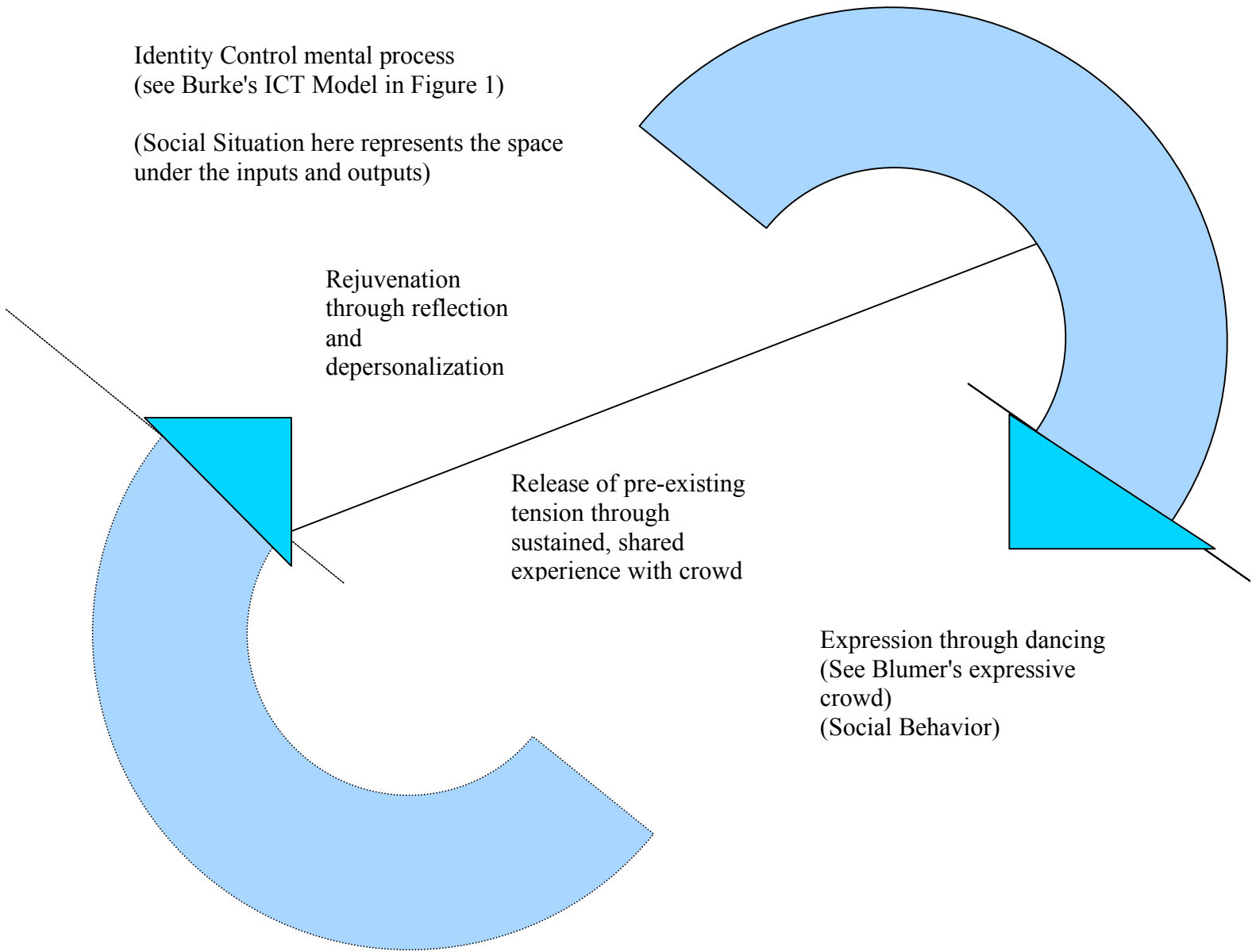
Identity Control mental process
(see Burke's ICT Model in Figure 1)

(Social Situation here represents the space
under the inputs and outputs)

Rejuvenation
through reflection
and
depersonalization

Release of pre-existing
tension through
sustained, shared
experience with crowd

Expression through dancing
(See Blumer's expressive
crowd)
(Social Behavior)



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ABSTRACT**IDENTITY MAINTENANCE THROUGH EMOTIONAL RELEASE AND
REJUVENATION: A LINK BETWEEN HARDCORE DANCING AND THE
STRAIGHTEDGE COLLECTIVE IDENTITY**

by

MICHAEL LANCE

December 2007

Advisor: Dr. Leon Warshay

Major: Sociology

Degree: Master of Arts

For many, the hardcore punk-rock show experience can act as a way to ritualize participation (and reinforce meanings) in the identities one associates with the experience. Blumer's expressive crowd offers insight into how such ritualized, yet seemingly chaotic behavior provides to many a cathartic release in a socially-stimulated, approved, and maintained atmosphere. In the process, such a release has consequences for the Straightedge identity tied to the experience, since Straightedge and hardcore punk coexist in the social construction of a larger sub-culture.

In this study, participation as such in the Straightedge (a lifestyle-based, diffuse social movement in which one resists drugs) collective identity is examined. Those in the Straightedge subculture who do not attend shows, dance at shows, and attend shows without dancing were interviewed via asynchronous e-mailing (and a few phone interviews) to qualitatively compare

the three groups based on how they experience being Straightedge at hardcore shows and in general. The dancing process was observed via participant observation of Straightedge and non-Straightedge dancers. Finally, an interview with some of the observed dancers was conducted using asynchronous emailing.

As the findings allow, the overall Straightedge collective identity is often tied to other “lower-level” identities, in this case as one who dances at hardcore shows. Here, identity maintenance is explained with an alternative form of Burke’s Identity Control model, which in this study explains processes of group or social identity instead of role identity, as Burke et al. use it. The cathartic release of the expressive crowd (à la Blumer) is posited as the social situational aspect of (the adapted) Burke’s Identity Control model to provide a subjective, yet structural Symbolic Interactionist account for this often-observed yet seldom-explained social phenomenon.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**All praises are due to Allah (SWT).**

Michael Lance began studying Sociology to learn more about the Scientific Method, which has helped his Science teaching significantly. As a result, he recommends the study of the Sociological Method to any Science Teacher. He has a wife and son and enjoys spending time with them. He also enjoys Skateboarding when he finds the time. He is drug-free: always has been and always will be.